

This volume has its genesis in the **21st Conference of the International Society for Board Game Studies** (BGS) held in Athens in April 2018. A session was dedicated to ancient games as part of the ERC project *Locus ludi. The Cultural Fabric of Play and Games in Classical Antiquity* (# 741520).

The identification of games, especially board games, and the study of their cultural role in ancient societies is a complex undertaking with many methodological issues. This pluridisciplinary book edited by Barbara Carè, Véronique Dasen and Ulrich Schädler focuses on case studies where games can be reframed in their archaeological and cultural contexts. Three axes, distributed according to the type of evidence and chronologically ordered, explore archeological sites and monuments, visual arts and literary genres ranging from the Late Minoan period (15th c. BC) to the reception of ancient ludic culture in contemporary literature.

**BACK TO THE GAME:
REFRAMING PLAY AND GAMES IN CONTEXT**



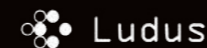
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edited by
Barbara Carè
Véronique Dasen
Ulrich Schädler

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LOCUS LUDI

The Cultural Fabric of Play and
Games in Classical Antiquity



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Back to the game: reframing play and games in context

An introduction

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This volume has its genesis in the 21st Conference of the International Society for Board Game Studies (BGS)¹ held in Athens in April 2018, entitled “Dialogues and Interactions”. Organized by Barbara Carè, it was hosted by the Italian School of Archaeology and the Benaki Museum.

¹ See the 2018 BGS programme on <https://locusludi.ch/locusludi-conferences/>. Founded in 1997, the International Society for Board Game Studies aims at investigating the history and development of board games throughout the world as well as promoting exchanges between scholars, curators, collectors, and contemporary creators of games. Since 2001, the society's colloquium is held annually.

28 years after Irving Finkel's path breaking conference *Ancient Board Games in Perspective* hosted by the British Museum in 1990,² and 23 years after Alex de Voogt's first BGS colloquium in Leiden 1995,³ the wide range of topics addressed in this symposium demonstrated the wealth of knowledge to be gained thanks to the study of board games as research objects in varied fields such as anthropology, cognition, and digital reconstructions.

One entire session, organized by Véronique Dasen and Ulrich Schädler, was specifically devoted to recent research on Greek and Roman game equipment, including boardgames. All the authors collected in this volume contributed to the symposium. This session formed part of the project *Locus Ludi. The Cultural Fabric of Play and Games in Classical Antiquity* funded by the European Research Council (ERC),⁴ which aims at recording the spatial distribution of gaming devices according to chronology, typology, context, reconstructing the development of ancient games as well as investigating games as the material fabric of ancient communities, questioning the identity of the players and the function of games according to context, domestic, public, sacred, funerary.

The identification of games, especially board games, and the study of their cultural role in ancient societies is a complex undertaking with many methodological issues. This pluridisciplinary volume focuses on case studies where games can be reframed in their archaeological and cultural contexts. Three axes, distributed according to the type of evidence and chronologically ordered, explore archeological sites and monuments, visual arts and literary genres ranging from the Late Minoan period (15th c. BC) to the reception of ancient ludic culture in contemporary literature.

The first part is devoted to archaeological evidence. Six papers assess the difficult task of identifying ludic material culture and address critical issues involved in the interpretation of game-related objects. They

² FINKEL 2007.

³ DE VOOGT (ed.) 1995.

⁴ The project *Locus Ludi. The Cultural Fabric of Play and Games in Classical Antiquity*, based at the University of Fribourg, has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement no. 741520). Website: www.locusludi.ch.

highlight a series of methodological problems, in particular the multi-functionality of the items and the intersections between games and ritual activities. The selected range of contributions provide a well-documented image of how context matters.

Laetitia Phialon (*Amulets, gaming pieces, toys or offerings? Thoughts on animal figurines and funerary practices in the Late Bronze Age Aegean*) discusses gaming pieces unearthed in a tomb of the Late Bronze Age Crete and explores the polysemic value of the small-size animal figurine associated with this assemblage, suggesting a ludic function for this class of artefacts spread in the Aegean, concurrent or preceding their role as offerings in sacred and funerary spaces. The review of the extraordinary cone shells group from the 1974 excavation at the Mycenaean citadel – the largest currently known from the Late Bronze Age Aegean – offers to Vassiliki Pliatsika (*Why so serious? An extraordinary cone shell group from Mycenae and the problem of identifying Mycenaean board gaming Material*) the opportunity to reflect on the interpretation of these items as gaming pieces and to emphasize the social and cultural significance of games in Mycenaean Greece, whose culture of play is still scarcely known. For a better understanding of this material, the assemblage is examined in detail in association with the other finds from room Θ3 of House Θ and compared with other large cone shell groups from Mycenaean contexts. Looking at stones with circular depressions (“cup holes”) uncovered in Temple 4 at Kition, Jérémy Lamaze (*Games and oracular practices around the hearth: the “table of offerings” from the so-called Temple 4 at Kition-Kathari (Cyprus)*) touches upon the blurred boundaries between game and religious rituals, turning back to the well-known concern regarding these stones: “for games or for gods?”. Although their interpretation as “table of offerings” is abandoned, their use as gaming stones is still controversial, and J. Lamaze recalls that they may not be completely devoid of ritual significance.

Gaming device are one of the expressions of social identity in Archaic Greece. Two papers explore their meaning in Greek funerary contexts where they belong to the construction of a material and metaphorical discourse about the deceased which can be variously interpreted. For Dimitris Paleothodoros (*Board games equipment from archaeological contexts in archaic Attica*), who reviews the evidence for Attic decorated terracotta

dice and game boards in graves ranging from the middle of the 7th to the middle of the 6th century BC, the practice had a specific social and ideological meaning related to the notion of leisure, and it was intended for the (male) upper classes. Archaic game equipment can also function as status markers for women. Women are never depicted, nor described playing dice and boardgames in this period which appears as reserved to men, as in the extensive series of vase painting showing Achilles and Ajax. Archaeological finds contribute to deconstructing this male centred view. Victoria Sabetai (*A Boeotian die in context: Gaming pieces, jewellery, seals, spindle whorls and bird bowls in a female burial of status*) offers a significant new addition by presenting the first known 6th century Boeotian die, made of clay, unearthed in an undisturbed rich female grave in Boeotia, with a peculiar configuration of twenty-five dots instead of six. The detailed study of the funerary furnishing reveals a possible early set of gaming pieces composed of shells, stored in a wine vessel with five pebbles alluding to the *pentelitha* game. The assemblage contributed to the metaphorical self-representation of the high status of a young deceased and her family in Archaic Greece.

Similar identification issues are raised by the study of Roman period gaming material. In Cremona, different categories of tools – dice, glass lenticular counters, bone counters and a token with a rectangular body – were unearthed during excavations of late Republican/early Imperial houses in the city of Cremona. Lynn Arslan Pitcher and Chiara Bianchi (*Roman game finds from Cremona (Italy)*) revise the past interpretation of these items, whose destination is still controversial. Possible ludic functions can now be evaluated based on comparison with new material of the same period. The identification, chronological setting and function of board games carved into stone floors in the public and urban space are another matter of debate. Barbara Carè (*Pavement designs and game boards from public spaces of ancient Athens: a review across the board*) addresses the dating and meaning of the designs preserved on the ancient and Roman Agora and Hadrian's Library at Athens. She offers an overview of the pavement motifs, of their features and locations in order to propose a plausible dating of their engraving and of their use according to their contexts. In this ancient urban landscape, several designs and patterns long assumed to be playing boards should be reconsidered, and a number now appear to date not earlier than Late Antiquity.

A second part is dedicated to the study of visual representations of boardgames or gaming devices, in sacred or funerary contexts, which often have a strong metaphorical dimension. Five contributions, based on the study of Greek and Roman monuments from funerary and sacred contexts – marble steles and plaques, statues and terracotta figures, provide new insights on the social, gendered, and religious dynamics of games.

The relation of board games, abaci and education is evidenced on a late 5th century BC funerary relief from Krannon (Thessaly) which may represent the earliest depiction of a “pebble” mathematician. The man sitting before a board carved with five lines could be training the boy standing beside him and playing with his dog. For Véronique Dasen and Jérôme Gavin, the five lines pattern is envisaged from a wider perspective as part of a training system including games as well as numeracy (*Game board or abacus? Greek counter culture revisited*). They suggest a new way of reckoning with the five lines design. Coming of age is also the focus of Despina Ignatiadou and Irimi Papaikonou (*The knucklebone and the goose playing and jeopardy for the boy of Lilaia*). The knucklebones held in the hand of an early 3rd century BC chubby and smiling statue of a boy found in Lilaia (ancient Phocis), related with the healing cult of Kephissos, can be interpreted as an iconic sign symbolising luck and healthy growing. A unique scene of board-game is analysed by Maria Chidioglou (*A playful coroplast? a new look at the terracotta group of the early roman board-game players NAM 4200 and related finds*). An early Roman terracotta group found in 1855 in a grave from modern *Syntagma* – Constitution Square in Athens depicts a man and a woman interacting, seated at a table playing *polis*, or another game similar to the Roman *ludus latruncularum*, in the company of a dwarf. Impressed images on the back of the seats of the players can be interpreted a visual discourse on victory or defeat ideology.

Ulrich Schädler (*Catacomb games: reused game boards or funerary inscriptions?*) raises the question whether marble boards for “XII scripta” or “Alea”, used to close loculi in Christian catacombs near Rome, are re-used game boards (as hitherto suggested) or funerary slabs in the shape of game boards produced for sepulchral use. He observes that the boards from the Catacombs differ in shape from boards that were really used for playing,

and that the hexagrams have subliminal to clear sepulchral references. Francesco Muscolino (*Une tabula lusoria ou « triple enceinte » et l'inscription funéraire de Agate filia comites Gattilanis à Milan*) discusses the association of a funerary inscription with a Nine men's morris design on the funerary slab of Agate, daughter of an Ostrogoth comes, dated to 512 AD. Were the pattern and inscription deliberately combined or were they just connected in a secondary, funerary, use of the slab. Did it depict a Nine men's morris design with a ludic function? Most likely the design is not for a game board, but has a symbolic function.

The third part addresses punning allusions to board games in ancient and modern literature. Geoff Bakewell (*Plato plays Polis*) examines the political references of Socrates to the ancient boardgame *polis* in Plato's *Republic*; like *pestoi*, Callipolis' guardians are trained to be equal and interchangeable. The throws of dice and knucklebones could also be diverted for Fortune-telling based on Greek hexametric verses. Homeric epics were thus transformed in Late Antiquity into lot-oracles preserved in papyri and ostraca (Salvatore Costanza, *Rolling dice for divination, gambling and homero-manteia*). Another transformation of board games as a plot motif is found in ancient and modern fiction. Ioannis M. Konstantakos retraces how storytelling was adapted to the rules and phases of riddles and boardgames (*Board games in ancient fiction: Egypt, Iran, Greece*) since the ancient Near East (1st millennium BC), in the Demotic Egyptian *Tale of Setne Khaemwaset* (Saite period), to Apion in Late Antiquity.

Acknowledgments

Such a large conference, including the publication of its proceedings, could have not been made possible without the active involvement and support of several institutions and individuals.

We are grateful to the Benaki Museum and the Italian School of Archaeology at Athens for their hosting of the Conference. A special thank is own to the Director of the Italian School of Archaeology at Athens, Prof. Emanuele Papi, and to the whole staff and members who helped out with secretarial tasks and provided precious support during the running of the sessions. We also wish to express our gratitude to *The Classical Association* for the financial support aimed at promoting postgraduate attendance.

We are greatly indebted to Samuel Sottas (Fribourg University) for his precious assistance in revising and editing the texts and to Kyriaki Katsarelia (Fribourg University) for her careful revision of the Greek abstracts. Our thanks go also to all the speakers for making the conference such a successful and playful event and for their valuable contribution to the progress of this field of study. Finally, the stay and the research of the team members, as well the preparation and the publication of this volume were achieved thanks to the support of the ERC project *Locus Ludi. The Cultural Fabric of Play and Games in Classical Antiquity*.

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**I.
GAMING
PIECES AND
BOARDGAMES**

Amulets, gaming pieces, toys or offerings? Thoughts on animal figurines and funerary practices in the Late Bronze Age Aegean

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Abstract. The assemblage of four cones (ivory, stone) and an astragalus marked with dots from Katsambas in Crete is so far the best evidence of gaming pieces uncovered in an Aegean tomb of the Late Bronze Age. A small faience animal associated with the same burial, that of a child, attracted however little attention, and raises the question whether it may be added as a possible game piece to this set. Although this holed piece was certainly used as a personal ornament or amulet, this paper gives the opportunity to review the functions of small faience, stone and ivory animal figurines in the Aegean, especially the couchant ones. It also introduces the notion of chance and fate linked to playing on the basis of cross-cultural comparisons in the Eastern Mediterranean. Additionally, the hypothesis that small standing terracotta quadrupeds may have initially served as toys before having functioned as votive or funerary offerings in Aegean cult places and tombs is further explored. Special interest is shown on Mycenaean funerary assemblages from Prosymna in the Argolid and Perati in Attica featuring small terracotta animals and cone shells, inasmuch as these objects may be seen as potential toys and gaming pieces.

Grave goods, jewellery, Minoan Crete, Mycenaean Greece, Late Cypriot

Περίληψη. Το σύνολο τεσσάρων κώνων (ελεφαντοστό, λίθος) και ενός αστραγάλου με στιγμές από τον Κατσαμπά στην Κρήτη αποτελεί μέχρι στιγμής το καλύτερο τεκμήριο αντικειμένων προωρισμένων για το παιχνίδι που βρέθηκε σε τάφο της Ύστερης Εποχής του Χαλκού στο Αιγαίο. Ωστόσο, ένα μικρό ειδώλιο ζώου από φαγεντιανή που σχετίζεται με την ίδια ταφή, αυτήν ενός παιδιού, έχει προσελκύσει ελάχιστη προσοχή και εγείρει το ερώτημα αν μπορεί να προστεθεί ως πιθανός πεσσός σε αυτό το σύνολο. Παρόλο που αυτό το αντικείμενο με οπή χρησιμοποιήθηκε σίγουρα ως προσωπικό κόσμημα ή φυλαχτό, στο παρόν άρθρο αναθεωρούνται οι λειτουργίες των μικρών ειδωλίων ζώων από φαγεντιανή, λίθο και ελεφαντοστό στο Αιγαίο, ιδίως όσων αναπαριστώνται σε οκλάζουσα στάση. Εισάγεται επίσης, η έννοια της τυχαιότητας και της μοίρας που συνδέεται με το παιχνίδι βάσει διαπολιτισμικών συγκρίσεων στην Ανατολική Μεσόγειο. Επιπλέον, διερευνάται περαιτέρω η υπόθεση ότι τα μικρά όρθια πήλινα τετράποδα μπορεί αρχικά να χρησιμοποιούνταν ως παιχνίδια πριν χρησιμοποιηθούν ως αναθήματα ή κτερίσματα σε λατρευτικούς χώρους και τάφους στο Αιγαίο. Ιδιαίτερο ενδιαφέρον επιδεικνύεται σε μυκηναϊκά ταφικά σύνολα από την Πρόσυμνα στην Αργολίδα και την Περαιτή στην Αττική, που περιλαμβάνουν μικρά πήλινα ζώα και κωνικά όστρεα, εφόσον τα αντικείμενα αυτά μπορούν να εκληφθούν ως πιθανά παιχνίδια και πεσσοί.

Κτερίσματα, κοσμήματα, μινωική Κρήτη, μυκηναϊκή Ελλάδα, Υστεροκυπριακό

Riassunto. Il nucleo di manufatti composto da quattro conici (in avorio e pietra) e da un astragalo contrassegnato da fori proveniente da Katsambas (Creta) costituisce attualmente una delle testimonianze meglio note per quanto riguarda strumenti di gioco associati a contesti funerari della tarda Età del Bronzo nell'area egea. Ha attirato, invece, scarsa attenzione una piccola figurina in *faience* in forma di animale proveniente dalla stessa sepoltura, attribuita ad un bambino, e la questione se essa possa essere inclusa in questo set come possibile strumento di gioco rimane tuttora aperta. Oltre a considerare l'ipotesi che tale manufatto, forato, sia stato usato come ornamento personale o amuleto, il contributo riesamina le varie possibili funzioni delle figurine di animali in *faience*, pietra e avorio dall'Egeo, soprattutto quelle in posizione araldica. Sulla base di confronti interculturali nel Mediterraneo orientale, vengono discussi i concetti di casualità e sorte legati al gioco. Inoltre, viene ulteriormente esplorata l'ipotesi che i piccoli quadrupedi stanti di terracotta possano aver svolto la funzione di giocattoli prima di costituire offerte votive o funerarie nei luoghi di culto e nelle tombe dell'Egeo. Di particolare interesse sono i corredi funerari micenei di Prosymna nell'Argolide e Perati in Attica, contenenti piccoli animali di terracotta e conchiglie coniche, potenzialmente interpretabili come giocattoli e strumenti di gioco.

Corredo funerario, monili, Creta minoica, Grecia micenea, Tardo Cipriota

Introduction

Since the discovery of an outstanding game board in the palace of Knossos in 1901,¹ the debate has mainly focused on the criteria for identifying Minoan game boards and pieces, that is, on slabs with depressions, astragali, seashells and other small objects, as discussed by Niklas Hillbom in his seminal publication on *Minoan game markers, pieces and dices*.² Other scholars have analysed the use and function of small Mycenaean terracotta figurines, including animal ones, assuming or rejecting the idea that they may have served as toys according to their find-context.³ However, the relationship between game pieces and toys in the Late Bronze Age Aegean remains little explored.

This paper will first focus on the gaming pieces from Katsambas in Minoan Crete.⁴ Special interest will then be shown on the small faience animal that likely belongs to the same burial. This will be the starting point of my reflection on the function of animal figurines in the Aegean. The debate will concentrate on materials, specific features and contexts of small zoomorphic figurines, with the aim of a better understanding of their use as potential amulets, gaming pieces, toys and offerings. I will eventually turn attention to terracotta animal figurines found together with seashells in Mycenaean funerary contexts, looking for possible traces of gaming practices and cultural transfers in the Eastern Mediterranean.

1. The astragalus and cones from Katsambas

An astragalus marked with one to four holes on each of its sides, two ivory cones and two chlorite ones were clearly identified as gaming pieces when first published by Stylianos Alexiou in 1967 (Fig. 1).⁵ These five objects, which correspond to an astragalus-die and four cone-shaped game

¹ EVANS 1921, 387, 472-476. This board, termed as The Royal Draught-board by Evans, as the Knossos game board (Kgb) by N. HILLBOM (2005, 201-202, 211), is made of rock crystal, ivory, silver, glass paste and gold (ca. 95 x 55 cm).

² HILLBOM 2005. Reviewed by SCHÄDLER 2008. Like N. CUCUZZA (2010, 135), I use in this paper the neutral term “slabs with depressions” instead of “cup-holes” (cf. HILLBOM 2005, 45-200; HILLBOM 2003).

³ TZONOU-HERBST 2002, 68-77; MORRIS 2017, 674; POMADÈRE 2018, 65. Against the idea of classifying (anthropomorphic) “minor figurines” as toys at Tiryns: KILIAN 1988, 148; for animal terracottas as votives see VETTERS 2015.

⁴ ALEXIOU 1967, 39, 57-58; HOOD 1971, 123.

⁵ ALEXIOU 1967, 39, 57-58, no. 36, pl. 28α (bottom left and right), no. 47, pl. 36γ.



Fig. 1

pieces,⁶ come from one of the seven chamber tombs (Tomb H) excavated at Katsambas, near Knossos, that have been assigned to the Late Minoan II and III A1 period (ca. 1450-1370 BC).⁷

Because of the series of holes on its sides, the Katsambas astragalus (L. 3.5 cm) is so far a unique piece in the Late Bronze Age Aegean. Other astragali discovered in the palace of Phaistos and the settlement of Khania are not worked but,

according to N. Hillbom, they were likely used for playing.⁸ However, the astragali from Phaistos were found either as a single item in a room, or as twelve bones in an uncertain context under the Central Court. This is insufficient to conclude that they may have constituted a game set. The playful dimension of the astragali from Khania may also be questioned, two of them were found in pair in the same context, the third one in a destruction level. The ivory cubic die from this settlement comes from another context.⁹

Various scholars have already stressed the multiple use, meanings and values of astragali.¹⁰ The material, size and number of the astragali, the evidence of wear or repair on them, as well as their context, exact find-spot

⁶ HOOD 1971, 123; HILLBOM 2005, 295, 313-314, fig. 18, 328-329. REESE 2000, 398: “Four latero-medial holes and two dorsoplantar holes”; holes going probably through the bone (probably *Ovis/Capra*). I thank David Reese for his invaluable comments and for sharing his data on seashells and astragali.

⁷ ALEXIOU 1967, 26-40, for the date, p. 1.

⁸ HILLBOM 2005, 312-313, 329; Phaistos: LEVI 1976 I:1, 217, fig. 336, 218, n. 12, 276; Khania: [Hallager – Hallager] GSEVI (LMI) forthcoming, 68-B 2, B3, unpublished, 84-Misc 125.

⁹ Building 1, Room A – however, probably post-Minoan (D.S. Reese, personal communication, 2019) – see HALLAGER – HALLAGER 2003, 70, 268, no. 70-B 4, pls. 148, 156a:9; HILLBOM 2005, 314-316, fig. 19. For a cubic seal ivory as a possible pictorial proto-die, with the Egyptian game board sign (*men*) from Ayia Triada (Tholos tomb A, Early Minoan III, ca. 2300/2200-2100/00 BC) see EVANS 1935, 521; HILLBOM 2005, 317-318.

¹⁰ On the use of astragali in oracular practices see AMANDRY 1984, 377. On astragali for games of chance or skill see SCHÄDLER 1996b; also, MAY 1991. On astragali as possible divination tools see GILMOUR 1997, 272. On the apotropaic value of the astragali see CARÈ 2017, 185, n. 74. On bronze astragali and astragaloid lingots, natural astragali filled with lead, as well as astragali used as weight or monetary symbols in various regions of the Mediterranean from the Archaic to the Roman imperial period see CARÈ 2019 and DOYEN 2021.

and association with other elements are fundamental variables that should be considered before assuming that the astragali have been used for playing.¹¹ The same holds true for astragali from Tiryns (Argolid),¹² Lindos (Rhodes),¹³ and Kition (Cyprus) – among them a holed and lead-filled example, but devoid of a series of dots – and further astragali from various Late Cypriote sites (settlements, cult places and tombs).¹⁴ In funerary contexts, astragali have been traditionally regarded as toys and child specific material.¹⁵ However, astragali have been found in burials of adults too, as was the case in South Italy from the 6th to the 4th century BC, and may alternatively refer to social qualities and convivial practices.¹⁶

The best example of an astragalus found in a Late Bronze Age burial context most likely used for playing during lifetime comes from Tomb 23 at Hala Sultan Tekke in Cyprus (LC IIIA, ca. 1200-1100 BC),¹⁷ because of its specific positioning in the tomb and association with other objects probably linked to game practices. This astragalus was found close to the remains of an ivory box, and may have fallen from it, as did the three spool-shaped (or “pulley-shaped”) faience objects lying south-east of and below this box. All these pieces constitute a coherent game set.

As regards the Katsambas cones, the two ivory pieces are no higher than 2 cm with a diameter of 1 cm (max. diam. 1 cm; H. 2 cm). They are thus similar in shape but clearly smaller than the ivory cones from the palace of Knossos (H. 6.7-8.2 cm; diam. 6.1-8.2 cm) which are the same size as the lower medallions of the famous game board uncovered in another room of the palace.¹⁸ The chamber tombs at Katsambas did not provide any kind of game board, but the hypothesis of an unpreserved wooden game

¹¹ On similar fundamental variables for interpreting the value of shells see CARÈ 2018, 148.

¹² Settlement: RAHMSTORF 2008, 212-214, pl. 82, 98.8.9.

¹³ Tomb 2, late 12th-early 11th c. BC (VRATSALI – FARMAKIDOU 2012, 789).

¹⁴ REESE 1985, 382-385; GILMOUR 1997, 169; REESE – LERNAU 2018, 523-524.

¹⁵ CARÈ 2017, 176-178. On astragali correlated to a prenuptial status of the dead, and the inappropriate hypotheses of astragali accompanying adult deceased involved in astragalomanteia or in ritual activities see CARÈ 2017, 183.

¹⁶ CARÈ 2017, 187-188.

¹⁷ NIKLASSON 1983, 171-172, N1380, fig. 435, also p. 185, n. 13a. *Ovis/Capra* astragalus (D.S. Reese). For the shells from this tomb see below.

¹⁸ HILLBOM 2005, 203-204, fig. 1, 228-230, fig. 9-10; EVANS 1901-1902, 14, n. 1; EVANS 1921, 477-479, fig. 342a, b. This good match led scholars to identify this board as a game board (see discussion in SCHÄDLER 1996a, 9; HILLBOM 2005, 264). However, it has been challenged that the rosettes from Tylissos and Mycenae belonged to game boards (HILLBOM 2005, 23, 242-245).

board is not ruled out by the excavator.¹⁹ The deposition of game boards in Late Minoan tombs is uncertain. It has been suggested that the inlays (ivory, faience, glass, shell and stone) from Tomb 2 of the Isopata cemetery may have belonged to a game board by comparison with similar pieces from various rooms of the palace at Knossos, those of the “Draughtboard” included,²⁰ whereas thirty-two clay “counters” (eighteen cylindrical, slightly concave, and fourteen pyramidal) possibly used for playing come from the same cemetery (Isopata, T. 6, LM II/III A1, ca. 1450-1370 BC, thus contemporary with the tombs of Katsambas).²¹ The fact that the inlays and “counters” were uncovered in two different tombs do not allow us to consider them a conclusive evidence of a gaming set.

The best counterparts for the Katsambas cone-shaped gaming pieces probably come from Cyprus. Tomb 14 at Kalavassos-*Ayios Dhimitrios* provided five faience cones together with six glass squares (Late Cypriot IIB, ca. 1375-1325 BC).²² The squares may have originally been applied on an unpreserved game board, possibly a box,²³ “for the game of twenty rather than senet”.²⁴ According to Alison South (personal communication, 2018), bones and grave goods, the faience cones and three of the glass squares, were scattered on the floor of this tomb, while three other glass squares lay on the bench of this chamber. Although these finds (gaming pieces and glass squares) cannot be associated with a specific burial, it must be stressed that the remains of two men and a juvenile of 3-7 years old have been identified in this tomb.²⁵

It may be argued that the gaming pieces in Tomb 14 at Kalavassos,

¹⁹ ALEXIOU 1967, 39.

²⁰ PRESTON 2007, 270-271, 308-312, fig. 35-37; for the shells (*Thylacodes arenarius*) see KARALI 1999, 130 (*Lementina arenaria*).

²¹ PRESTON 2007, 292, 305-306 (“identification hypothetical”), inv. 1672.1-18 and 19-32, fig. 34.

²² HILLBOM 2005, 296; also SOUTH 1997, 167; SOUTH 2000, 354. I thank Alison South very much for sharing new information on Tomb 14 at Kalavassos, and a picture of the glass and faience pieces (three pinched cones, two normal cones). For the grave goods from this tomb see SOUTH 2006, 139. Final publication forthcoming.

²³ SOUTH 1997, 165-167; SOUTH 2000, 353-354.

²⁴ CRIST – DUNN-VATURI – DE VOOGT 2016, 76; for a LBA double-sided ivory game box (*senet* and 20-squares) from Thebes (Egypt) see CRIST – DUNN-VATURI – DE VOOGT 2016, 88-90, fig. 4.5; FINKEL 2008, 152-153. This box is decorated with animals in lying (rather than in a “flying gallop”), crouching and kneeling positions. For an ivory box from Enkomi see DIKAIOS 1969/71, 638, pl. 30:2, 128:66, 129, 156:49.

²⁵ There is only one metatarsal bone preserved from the juvenile (A.K. South, personal communication, 2018).

a Cypriot centre of trade and circulation of goods with a community receptive to various cultural interactions and influences, may reflect social practices transferred from the Levant, where boards and boxes for *senet* and game of twenty likely functioned as greeting or exchange gifts in the Late Bronze Age.²⁶ The display of valuables such as *exotica* at the funeral could explain the offering of a foreign game set to the tomb. This would also be true for the burial of a wealthy adult male at Hala Sultan Tekke (Tomb 23, LC IIIA) that contained three spool-shaped gaming pieces of faience similar to Egyptian ones, as well as remains of an ivory box, perhaps for board games.²⁷ The same line of reasoning may be applied for the gaming pieces from Katsambas.

2. The small faience animal from Katsambas

According to the excavator, the game set from Tomb H at Katsambas was probably associated with the child sarcophagus (larnax 2) located in the south-west corner of the chamber and the child's phalanx bone found close to its entrance.²⁸ However, the exact positioning of the astragalus and cone-shaped pieces in the tomb remain unknown. By contrast, other finds from this tomb were clearly related to the child's larnax 2, among them a small faience animal and a glass paste rosette.²⁹

The faience animal is small (L. 2.5, H. 1 cm) and described as “couchant [or crouching] and turning its head to the left with two holes”³⁰ (Fig. 2). These two holes are pierced through its body. In this respect, this piece has been rightly regarded as a pendant in the form of a lying or couchant animal.³¹ More precisely, the figurine is a bovine animal, even if the lateral parts

²⁶ Two games of respective Egyptian and Near Eastern origins. CRIST – DUNN-VATURI – DE VOOGT 2016, 73, 101 (also in Cyprus, as heirlooms between the 16th and 12th c. BC). For ancient Mesopotamian games see DRAFFKORN KILMER 1993. For a frit monkey figurine from Mycenae as a hypothetical game piece see CLINE 1991, 41. For seated monkey shaped pendants “as exotica or of an exotic inspiration” in the Aegean see SGOURITSA 2012: 542-543.

²⁷ NIKLASSON 1983, 175-176, 180, N1357, N1360, N1362, N1230, fig. 448a-c, 450.

²⁸ ALEXIOU 1967, 39, also 35 (phalanx bone).

²⁹ On the exact location of the finds from Tomb H, see ALEXIOU 1967, 31-32: two ceramic vases (8, 17) close to the south-west corner; a small faience animal (7) and a glass paste rosette (48) close to the larnax 2; a small hollow part of a bronze utensil under the larnax 2, and a small bronze pin at the south-west corner.

³⁰ ALEXIOU 1967, 55, pl. 36a, no. 7 (350): “Ζώδιον ἐκ φαγεντιανῆς, μήκους 0.025 μ. καὶ ὕψους 0.01 μ, παριστάμενον ὀκλάζον, καὶ στρέφον τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀριστερὰ μετὰ δύο ὀπῶν διαμπερῶν (πίν. 36α). Π.Β. ΑΕ 1888, πίν. 8 ἀριθ. 13, πίν. 9 ἀριθ. 17”.

³¹ EFFINGER 1996, 186.



Figs. 2-3

of its head (where the ears and horns should be) are not preserved, because of its large muzzle, the position of its head and legs. A lion in a couchant position would be characterized by its head with a mane and large paws usually directed forwards.³²

It has already been pointed out that “faience figurines of animals have been infrequently recovered” in the Aegean Bronze Age,³³ among them a fragment of a bull head³⁴ and that of a bull leg³⁵ from the palace of Knossos (ca. 1700-1500 BC) and only a part of a possible horn from Tomb 2 at Isopata (not earlier than 1450 BC).³⁶ There is no accurate parallel for the Katsambas faience animal in Minoan Crete. Some distant parallels come from the mainland (ca. 1600-1200 BC): Tomb 82

at Mycenae-*Kalkani* (Argolid) yielded two similar small compact faience bulls or cows in a recumbent position, both perforated by two holes, and for this reason classified as beads (Fig. 3).³⁷ A similar compact and perforated recumbent bull/cow was uncovered in Tiryns, whereas a (glass/faience) bead in the shape of a holed lion, whose head is missing, also from Tiryns, looks perhaps closer in shape to the Katsambas bull.³⁸ The compact shape of these bovine animals raises the question whether their

³² See below, the ivory lion of Mycenae (KRZYSZKOWSKA 2007, 20-23, pl. 3-4). For animals in a resting position represented on seals see CROWLEY 2013, 53, 103 (T13, I81, pairs of couchant bulls), 106 (I87, couchant lion, with paws forwards, and sejant one).

³³ FOSTER 1979, 78. My article focuses on quadrupeds; for bird shaped beads see SGOURITSA 2012, 542.

³⁴ FOSTER 1979, 79, fig. 12. MM IIIA Ivory Deposit.

³⁵ FOSTER 1979, 79-80. Vestibule of the Jewel Fresco, MM III/LM IA ?

³⁶ PRESTON 2007, 271, 308, inv. 1672.48.

³⁷ XENAKI-SAKELLARIOU 1985, 233, no. Φ 3124, pl. 111, and II; with two parallels in gold (T. 58), p. 181, no. X 2868, pl. 76.

³⁸ RAHMSTORF 2008, 228-229, pl. 86; 96.1a.b-2. a. b, no. 2030 (bull), 1747 (lion).

resemblance with knucklebones (astragali) is accidental or intentional.³⁹ A fourth example from Thebes in Boeotia, found in a Late Helladic IIIB floor deposit (Pavloyiannopoulou plot), can be added to this review.⁴⁰

Pierced gold items in the shape of recumbent bulls were also uncovered in Mycenae, including two animals in a compact form similar to the aforementioned faience beads/pendants.⁴¹ As regards gold pieces, small couchant animals found in the Aegean were usually pierced and unambiguously identified as pieces of jewellery (beads or pendants), for instance a lying calf coming from Knossos (deposit near the Temple Tomb, Late Minoan IA),⁴² a couchant lion from Ayia Triada (Tomb 5, probably Late Minoan I, ca. 1700/1600-1470/1450 BC) and a similar one from Mycenae (Shaft Grave III),⁴³ and another lion from Mycenae (chamber tomb, Late Helladic).⁴⁴ It is also worth noting a stone mould from the workshops at Poros, near Knossos, carrying the hollow shape of a couchant quadruped with its head turned backward, together with three other motifs, including that of a seashell (likely a scallop).⁴⁵ The fastening of small animals on gold vessels was an uncommon feature in the Aegean and the gold couchant lion from Mycenae that adorned the handle of a lost vessel appears to be an isolated case.⁴⁶

In addition, there are a few well known small couchant animal figurines of stone in the Aegean. One may refer to five small dogs from the Mount Juktas (steatite and chlorite, L. from 1.63 to 3.5 cm, peak

³⁹ I thank U. Schädler for this observation at the XXI BGS Colloquium.

⁴⁰ SPYROPOULOS 1971, 209, pl. 183c; RAHMSTORF 2008, p. 228. Archaeological Museum of Thebes (Boeotia): "Glass model of a sedent heifer".

⁴¹ For two gold beads in the shape of bovine animals from Mycenae (T. 58), see n. 37. For a gold bull in a less compact shape (Tomb 68) see XENAKI-SAKELLARIOU 1985, 194, X 2947, pl. 84; PAPADIMITRIOU 2015, 120.

⁴² EFFINGER 1996, 221, KnT 31, pl. 8.c, L. 2.3 cm.

⁴³ A. Triada, Tomb 5 (LM IIIA-III B), but possibly older than its use (EFFINGER 1996, 184, HT 9c, pl. 2.o, L. 3 cm). For parallels from Mycenae and Naxos see PAPAETHYMIU 1973, 380-391; from A. Triada and Mycenae also POURSAT 2008, 244, fig. 341-342 (A. Triada: pendentif, L. 2.7 cm; Mycenae, Grave Circle A, T. III, L. 3.6, LH I); THOMAS 2004, 194, no. 5, fig. 9.29 "recumbent", also a gold over silver pendant in the shape of a couchant lion, see p. 197, no. 21, fig. 9.35; RAHMSTORF 2008, 229.

⁴⁴ XENAKI-SAKELLARIOU 1985, 214-215, no. X 2949, pl. 98.

⁴⁵ EVELY 2000, 412-413, Type 2c, no. 12, HM 2540, prob. LM IIIA1, cf. PAPAETHYMIU, Kr Kh 25 (1973) 375ff, pls. IB¹-ID¹ [PAPAETHYMIU 1973; with a close parallel in gold sheet from Thebes (Boeotia), p. 381, pl. IE¹].

⁴⁶ KARO 1911, 258, fig. 10. Inv. No. 991.

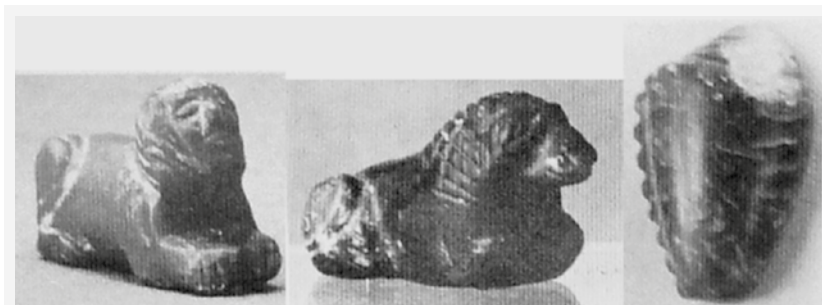


Fig. 4

sanctuary, MM II-LM IB)⁴⁷ and one dog from Malia (L. 2.6, *Quartier Mu*, MM II)⁴⁸ in Crete, and one animal from the sanctuary at Phylakopi on Melos (West Shrine, LH IIIC, ca. 1130-1120 BC).⁴⁹ The animal from Phylakopi, longitudinally perforated, has certainly been worn as a pendant or amulet, but the steatite dog from Mount Juktas with “two holes drilled on its flat underside” was probably “attached to the lid of a small box”.⁵⁰ They were deposited as votive objects in these cult places. By comparison, carnelian small figurines from the settlement of Enkomi, among them a sphinx and a couchant lion (LC II or III), as well as a cone shell skeuomorph (LC III), have also been interpreted as pendants or amulets (Fig. 4).⁵¹

Therefore, the examples provided so far leave little doubt about the function of the small pierced faience bull from Katsambas: it was used as a personal ornament, not as a gaming piece. Moreover, the idea that items of jewellery in the shape of couchant animals may have been used as protective amulets in the Aegean needs to be further explored, in particular

⁴⁷ KARETSOU – KOEHL 2014. Together with a sixth couchant dog made of gold and a seventh one, maybe leaping, made of ivory, all puppies or young dogs with dangling ears and large paws. Same position as the couchant lions: EFFINGER 1996, 127: “Dog/Lion”. For a couchant dog on a gold discoid seen as guard dog (Tomb at Poros, MM III-LM IA) see DIMOPOULOU 2010. For adult dogs with large head and paws on seals see CROWLEY 2013, 138, E 18, *cmSV* Supp. 1B, 58, 146, E 33, *cmS* II 3, Nr. 52.

⁴⁸ DETOURNAY – POURSAT – VANDENABEELE 1980, 109-110, no. 154, fig. 149. This figurine is not holed.

⁴⁹ With its head lacking see RENFREW 1985, 346 (SF 2008), fig. 8.12, pl. 61.b, also p. 349 (MLb East layer 13, 2b), 82, table 3.2 (date, 2b).

⁵⁰ KARETSOU – KOEHL 2014, 335, pl. XCVII. The holes do not go through its body.

⁵¹ COURTOIS – LAGARCE 1986, 114 (“de type égyptien, sauf peut-être celui [...] appelé ‘cône’”), pl. xx.21, 24, 25. See COURTOIS 1984, 146-147, fig. 45.13, 16, 25 (longitudinally perforated), pl. XVI.9, 12, 20. A miniature (unpierced?) crouching lion is now exhibited at the Museum of Heraklion. For an earlier small pierced faience astragalus from Tomb 258 at Megiddo (MB II, 18th c. BC) see GUY 1938, pl. 115.24.

with regard to the question of a magical power possibly inspired by foreign symbolic values, or perhaps by religious concepts.

3. A note on Egyptian ivory couchant lions

Egyptian ivory couchant lions, such as the ivory lions from the tomb of Zer (Djer) at Abydos (1st Dynasty),⁵² are usually regarded as gaming pieces or counters related to the *mehen* game, which was in use during the Early Dynastic period, and thus belong to a much older cultural context than the Late Bronze Age animal figurines mentioned so far, including the Katsambas faience animal. Some of these Egyptian animal figurines are perforated.⁵³ The holes may have served for hanging the lions, perhaps for storage purposes,⁵⁴ or for symbolic or amuletic uses, as votive objects.⁵⁵ In Egypt, the *mehen* game went out of use after the Old Kingdom period.⁵⁶ Traces of this game survived in Cyprus in the Late Cypriot period, as attested by stone boards with depressions in spiral patterns found in later contexts on this island.⁵⁷ To date, there is no clear evidence of *mehen* game boards uncovered in the Aegean. In this respect, it is difficult to confirm that the stone with depressions arranged in a spiral design found in Kato Zakro in Eastern Crete was used for playing and not for ritual purposes only.⁵⁸

In addition, it must be stressed that Egyptian faience gaming pieces of the second and first millennium BC are mostly pinched cone-shaped or spool-shaped,⁵⁹ rarely in the shape of animal heads.⁶⁰ In the Aegean, by comparison, only two animal figurines, both made of ivory, are regarded

⁵² PETRIE 1901, 23, no. 3-4, pl. VI; PETRIE 1903, 24, no. 23-29, pl. III; also HILLBOM 2005, 302; KENDALL 2007, 34, n. 12. See online Tomb of Djer, EA35529, British Museum.

⁵³ Ivory Game Pieces in the shape of a holed lion: British Museum, EA35529 (Tomb of Djer, 3050 BC) and EA64093.

⁵⁴ As it may be the case of *mehen* and men boards (see CRIST – DUNN-VATURI – DE VOOGT 2016, 38).

⁵⁵ Without boards, the function of the lions can be challenged (see CRIST – DUNN-VATURI – DE VOOGT 2016, 26).

⁵⁶ ROTHÖHLER 1999, 19, also p. 164.

⁵⁷ LC IA, ca. 1550 BC: SWINY 1986, 59, cited by JACOBSSON 1987, 179; MALISZEWSKI 2012, 172. CRIST – DUNN-VATURI – DE VOOGT 2016, 36.

⁵⁸ CRIST – DUNN-VATURI – DE VOOGT 2016, 37. See HILLBOM 2005, 108; SWINY 1986, 59 (Zakros, Room H, 1900-1700 BC), fig. 42.g, see *Ergon* 1973, 107, fig. 102. For the discovery (no reference to Egyptian contacts) see PLATON 1971, 240.

⁵⁹ *Senet* or 30-Squares Game Box 1400-1200 BC, British Museum EA66669. Set with wooden game box, Metropolitan Museum 12.182.72a, b.

⁶⁰ HILLBOM 2005, 302; CRIST – DUNN-VATURI – DE VOOGT 2016, 64-65, fig. 3.6. See FINKEL *et alii* 1991, 144-147, fig 132-133.



Fig. 5

as counters for a board game by N. Hillbom, in line with Doro Levi's opinion⁶¹ (Fig. 5). These are a lion's head and a bull's leg found together with a bone disc marked with a moon crescent on one side and dots on the other⁶² in a ceramic goblet in Room LI of the palace of Phaistos (Middle Minoan II, ca. 1800-1700 BC).

The function of these pieces as counters for board games has been challenged, on the assumption of an accidental grouping in a goblet. The fact that the ivory bull's leg as

well as the disc are both holed goes against the idea that these objects may have functioned together as gaming pieces, but supports the view that the leg may have been a part of a bull figurine and the disc used as a bead.⁶³ Moreover, a small steatite pendant in the shape of a quadruped, possibly a bull, also comes from another part of this room.⁶⁴ The discovery of an astragalus in the same room⁶⁵ may rekindle discussions in favour of a gaming function for these pieces, though it was not found in the goblet. Nevertheless, one astragal in itself is not necessarily an indication for play, and its association with the other pieces from this room cannot be proven.

As regards *senet* games, it is worth noting that the stone *senet* board from Athens – now recognized as a piece from an Egyptian collection – features a couchant lion with quite flat sides, carved on its top; a board that however cannot be dated precisely between the early 12th century and the late 7th century BC,⁶⁶ between the destruction of Ugarit and the battle of Megiddo

⁶¹ LEVI 1952-54, 408 (room LI, 2nd phase); LEVI 1976, I:1, 218; HILLBOM 2005, 302, 328, D. ca. 1-1.5 cm. See also HOOD 1971, 123.

⁶² LEVI 1952-54, 412, fig. 32 (goblet), 414, fig. 36 (bone, ivory and stone objects, including the lion's head and bull's leg); LEVI 1976, I:1, 218, pl. 181.c, d, f.

⁶³ SCHÄDLER 1996a, 9.

⁶⁴ LEVI 1952-54, 412, 414, fig. 36.

⁶⁵ LEVI 1976, I:1, 217, fig. 336.

⁶⁶ DUNN-VATURI – CRIST – DE VOOGT 2017, 1, fig. 1, see p. 7 (date): "between the Ramesside and Late Period."

in the Levant. By comparison, the upper part of a Late Bronze Age ivory game of fifty holes from Megiddo features two lions confronting on one side, two goats on the other.⁶⁷ These standing animals carved in relief on the top of the holed side of the board do not correspond to free-standing figurines. In this respect, one may wonder whether a glazed lion from Enkomi on Cyprus (11.8 cm, LBA, ca. 1450-1200 BC)⁶⁸ might have been fixed on a game board. However, this lion is neither carved or moulded in the continuity of a board nor found in the same context as a game board, and could thus have decorated any box or furniture. There is also no concrete reason to believe that the ivory pairs of couchant animals, perhaps bovine ones, from Late Helladic tombs at Mycenae⁶⁹ adorned game boards rather than boxes used for other purposes.⁷⁰

Eventually, the famous couchant ivory lion from the Late Helladic III shrine of Mycenae (Room 31, LH IIIB1, ca. 1320-1250 BC) has never been regarded as a possible game piece or decorative part of a game board. Found with a male ivory head, the couchant ivory lion may have served either as a part of a cult image or as “a votive offering [...] made for that purpose”, according to Olga Krzyszkowska,⁷¹ who does not exclude a secondary use for both of them in this cult place. Even if its initial function and meaning remain an open question,⁷² it is unlikely that this ivory lion has been used as a game piece because of its large size (L. 17.7 cm⁷³). It is also implausible that it might have topped a game board, since no *senet* board has been so far uncovered on the Greek mainland or the Aegean islands.⁷⁴ The lion was possibly fixed through its hollow underside on a box, a piece of furniture or a stand.

⁶⁷ LOUD 1939, pl. 47; DUNN-VATURI – CRIST – DE VOOGT 2017, 6. On possible bulls adorning Assyrian stone boards for the game of fifty-eight holes see DUNN-VATURI – CRIST – DE VOOGT 2017, 6-7; see GADD 1934, 50; DRAFFKORN KILMER 1993, 360.

⁶⁸ British Museum, no. 1216 from T. 88 (CREWE – CATLING – KIELY 2009, 88.13); MURRAY – SMITH – WALTERS 1900, P34, fig. 62; COURTOIS – LAGARCE 1986, 139.

⁶⁹ XENAKI-SAKELLARIOU 1985, 97-98, E 2466, pl. 27 (T. 27), 154, pl. 54 (excavation 1887/88).

⁷⁰ For a cylindrical ivory pyxis with two pairs of lug-like handles formed by crouching animals (a lion and a fawn) see IMMERWAHR 1971, 166, 1-16, pl. 32.

⁷¹ KRZYSZKOWSKA 2007, 20-25, pl. 3-4. For a cult object see PAPADIMITRIOU 2015, 288-289. For lying lions attacking or devouring a prey on Archaic ivory offerings from the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia in Sparta see MARANGOU 1969, 112-124.

⁷² KRZYSZKOWSKA 2007, 24.

⁷³ POURSAT 2014, 214, fig. 297.

⁷⁴ DUNN-VATURI – CRIST – DE VOOGT 2017, 1-2.

4. Votive and other uses of couchant animal figurines in the Aegean

Back to the small faience animal from Katsambas, it must be added that this piece was certainly not used as a seal, since no incised or engraved pattern has been observed underneath its surface base, in contrast to an Early Minoan ivory seal in the form of crouching lion⁷⁵ and another ivory seal in the shape of a lying animal, perhaps a bovine one.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, the motif of recumbent bovines is encountered in the Aegean glyptic. Hard stone seals decorated with such a motif were uncovered in a few Late Bronze Age tombs in Crete and on the Greek mainland; some of them have been identified as warrior burials due to the weapons present in the grave assemblages (LM II/LH IIB-III A1, ca. 1450-1370 BC).⁷⁷ Seals of this class found in wealthy burials on the Greek mainland may have been acquired in LH III A1, along with other objects of possible Cretan origins, and may have functioned as high status emblems of a small group of individuals involved in “Cretan affairs”.⁷⁸

Moreover, there is no reason to believe that the Katsambas faience piece may have served as a weight, since weights in the form of couchant or recumbent animals, including bovine ones, are produced in bronze in the Eastern Mediterranean. A set of such figurative weights – some of them filled with lead – were for instance uncovered in a building at Kalavassos-*Ayios Dhimitrios* on Cyprus⁷⁹ (Late Cypriot IIC, ca. 1325-1225 BC) (Fig. 6). The Kalavassos bronze figurines may be compared to the weights in the shape of animals from the Uluburun shipwreck,⁸⁰ to the Megiddo hollowed ones,⁸¹ and to some Egyptian inscribed bronze weights in the form of

⁷⁵ EVANS 1935, 486, fig. 407, also two Middle Minoan stone seals (steatite, amethyst) in the form of compact couchant lions, fig. 415-416. See also *cms* V Suppl. 1B, Nr. 336 (carnelian).

⁷⁶ DIMOPOULOU-RETHEMIOTAKI 2005, 65, with two lions on the base surface of the seal. On an EM series of animal-shaped seals and Egyptian seal-amulets carved in the form of animals, see WEINGARTEN 2005, 761, pl. CXCII.b-e and CXCIII.

⁷⁷ DRAKAKI 2005-2006, 81-82, 86. More precisely, the motif is a pair of side-to-side recumbent bovines.

⁷⁸ DRAKAKI 2005-2006, 81, 91-93.

⁷⁹ SOUTH 1983, 103; COURTOIS 1983; SOUTH – RUSSELL – SCHUSTER KESWANI 1989, 23, 26, fig. 24, pl. IX; paper of M. Siennicka in the 24th EAA Annual Meeting, 2018. For a weight in the shape of a couchant bull from Enkomi (LC II) see COURTOIS 1984, 43, fig. 15.36, pl. III; COURTOIS – LAGARCE 1986, 26, 64, pl. XVIII.14.

⁸⁰ YALÇIN – PULAK – SLOTTA 2005, vol. 3, 616, no. 156; ARUZ – BENZEL – EVANS 2008, 369, no. 235a-f.

⁸¹ GUY 1938, pl. 128.12-14, MB II or LB II. For a bronze weight with lead ballast in the shape of a couchant bovine from Ras Shamra (Ugarit, LB, 13th c. BC) see CHAVANE 1987: 367-372.



Fig. 6

animals.⁸² There are only a very few Minoan parallels, such as two or three small lying bronze animals, including a cow (probably 14th c. BC), from Ayia Triada, which have been identified as possible weights by Angeliki Pilali-Papasteriou.⁸³ In contrast, this author prefers to underline the votive character of two other bronze lying wild goats from Ayia Triada, discovered with human figurines in attitude of worship (or adorants) in a room (Middle Minoan III-Late Minoan I, late 17th-16th c. BC).⁸⁴

It must be stressed that couchant animals are uncommon in Minoan Crete. The large majority of bronze and terracotta animal figurines are standing, and like the anthropomorphic ones, have been found in cult places (peak sanctuaries or sacred caves, urban sanctuaries).⁸⁵ The votive character of these figurines, like those from Ayia Triada, is obvious. It has been suggested that animal figurines were most likely brought in cult places with the purpose of attracting divine protection for the livestock, rather than be used as substitutes for real sacrifices of animals.⁸⁶

⁸² Tell el-Amarna, 18th dyn. (ca. 1353-1336 BC) (PENDLEBURY 1951, 290, no. 250, see p. 125, no. 280, pl. LXXVII). For bronze animal figurines associated with a reconstructed balance from Tell el-Amarna, New Kingdom (the Science Museum London) see MICHAÏLIDOU 2008, fig. III.27.

⁸³ PILALI-PAPASTERIOU 1985, 95, pl. 23, and 100, pl. 26 for lying bronze animals of the 7th and 6th c. BC.

⁸⁴ PILALI-PAPASTERIOU 1985, 2-3, pl. 22.

⁸⁵ POURSAT 2008, 214. Mount Juktas: ZEIMBEKI 2004. Proto-palatial Petsophas sanctuary: DIMOPOULOU-RETHEMIOTAKI 2005, 96-97.

⁸⁶ POURSAT 2008, 125; citing PLATON 1951 [p. 157 for sacrifices]. However, hollow terracotta bulls that previously served as rhyta (cult vessels) have perhaps functioned as substitutes in LM IIIB-IIIC (KOUROU – KARETSOU 1997, 113-115). On the use of hollowed animal figures as cult vessels see GUGGISBERG 1996, 343; associated with hunting and sacrificial rituals in LM/LH III cult places see GUGGISBERG 2009. For EBA plain zoomorphic figurines seen as “victims” see MARANGOÛ 1992, 210.

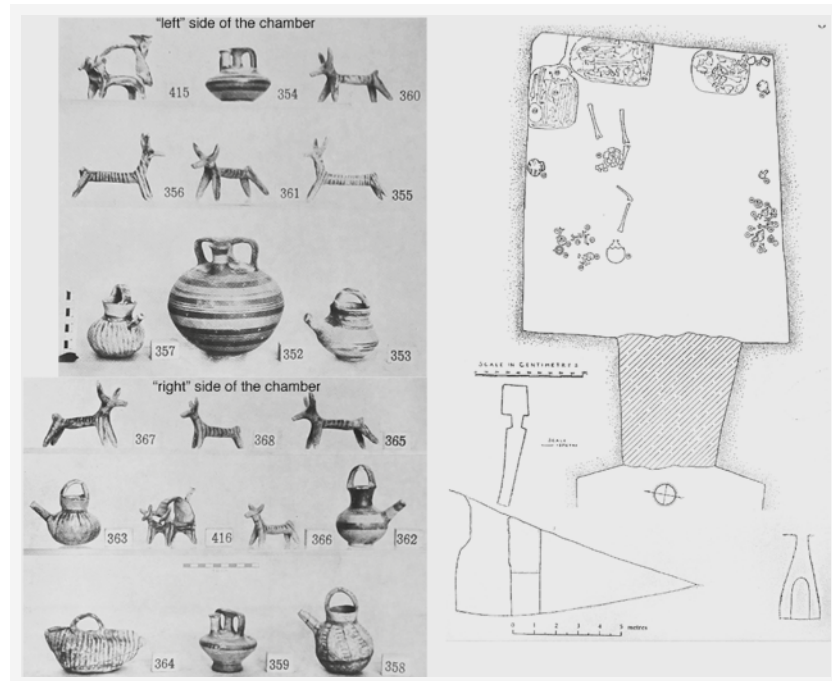


Fig. 7

On the Greek mainland, terracotta animal figurines have been frequently discovered in cult places, for instance, in a large quantity at Methana-*Ayios Konstantinos* in the Argolid,⁸⁷ and in a lesser extent at Amykles in Laconia.⁸⁸ However, couchant animals are virtually absent from the Late Helladic votive deposits. The small handmade and very stylized Mycenaean terracotta figurines of bovine animals have short upright legs (ca. 1400-1100).⁸⁹ Moreover, it is worth noting a clear functional distinction between these small plain animal figurines and larger hollow animal figures, the first being regarded as votive offerings, the second as cult vessels in Mycenaean Greece.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ KONSOLAKI 2002, esp. 28, fig. 3; TZONOU-HERBST 2002, 171-172: up to 150 figurines, most of them are animals. For a religious interpretation see KONSOLAKI-YANNOPOULOU 2016.

⁸⁸ DEMAKOPOULOU 2012; VLACHOU 2017, esp. 14. About 150 figurines, at least 40 of them are quadruped or bird figurines.

⁸⁹ FRENCH 1971, 151-164; POURSAT 2014, 205-206.

⁹⁰ RENFREW 1985, 239; TZONOU-HERBST 2002, 70; GUGGISBERG 1996, 331, 343, as possible cult images, p. 330, and perhaps, in funerary contexts, as substitutes for sacrifice, p. 301-303.

5. Terracotta animal figurines in Mycenaean funerary contexts

5.1 Assemblages with female anthropomorphic figurines and chariot models

According to Ioulia Tzonou-Herbst, zoomorphic terracotta figurines have been frequently uncovered in Late Helladic III tombs, but in a lesser quantity than in cult places and settlements of this period on the Greek mainland (ca. 1420/00-1100).⁹¹ Small terracotta animal figurines and miniature models like carts and chariots may have reflected daily values and realities (rider, cattle owner),⁹² but they have perhaps also been used as substitutes of prestigious objects.⁹³ In the case of children's burials, chariot models may have symbolized unfulfilled social expectations and parental aspiration.⁹⁴ It has also been argued that the terracotta female figurines had a magical power⁹⁵ that ensured the deceased a divine protection in the afterlife or for their journey to the Underworld.

The question arises whether the small terracotta animal figurines may have been initially used as toys or were purpose-made offerings. Traces of wear or repair would be a good indication for objects used for play during lifetime.⁹⁶ About miniature ceramic vessels and figurines found in Iron Age sanctuaries, scholars like Jean-Marc Luce have suggested that these objects may have been toys consecrated by children or their parents to the deity, or by young people at the transition to the adult age.⁹⁷ The polysemic nature of the ancient terracotta figurines and models has been underlined by various scholars.⁹⁸ This is also a quality attributed to the Mycenaean figurines according to the diversity of their find-contexts (cultic, funerary, household).⁹⁹

⁹¹ TZONOU-HERBST 2002, 268, table 3: for instance, from Mycenae, 33 items recorded on a total of 362 animal figurines.

⁹² POMADÈRE 2018, 64.

⁹³ For models of furniture see POLYCHRONAKOU-SGOURITSA 2003, 309. For bovid terracotta votives see VETTERS 2016, 42.

⁹⁴ THALER – VETTERS 2018, 491.

⁹⁵ For the discussion see FRENCH 1971, 108; TZONOU-HERBST 2002, 90-91.

⁹⁶ On identification of toys see DASEN 2012, 11. On a particular die, "damaged perhaps by use-life", from an Archaic tomb in Boeotia, that also provided a small terracotta quadruped, see in this volume the paper of V. Sabetai.

⁹⁷ LUCE 2011, 61-62. See also POMADÈRE 2018, 66.

⁹⁸ DASEN 2011, for animal figurines, p. 55. For female figurines of the first millennium BC see HUYSECOM-HAXHI – MULLER 2015, spec. 424, 437; POMADÈRE 2018, 67-68.

⁹⁹ FRENCH 1971, 107; TZONOU-HERBST 2002, 89-90, see NILSSON 1950, 308. On terracottas as grave goods in children's burials see POLYCHRONAKOU-SGOURITSA 1987, 23. On a symbolic and religious interpretation see PILALI-PAPASTERIOU 1998, 30-31.

The assemblages from Tomb XXII at Prosymna (ca. 1370-1250 BC) led Carl W. Blegen to consider, already in 1937, terracotta chariot groups as possible toys.¹⁰⁰ Two deposits from this tomb may have belonged to children, each of them including one or two “feeding bottles” among other small-sized vessels, as well as four or five animal figurines and a chariot model (Fig. 7).¹⁰¹ No children’s bones have been identified in this tomb, but the excavator did not rule out the possibility that the skeleton of a child had disintegrated.¹⁰²

The analysis of other funerary assemblages from the cemetery of chamber tombs at Prosymna in the Argolid (ca. 1600-1200 BC) allows us to question the function of terracotta animal figurines and other grave goods in relation to childhood (ca. 1400-1200 BC).¹⁰³ Eight collective chamber tombs of this cemetery of more than fifty tombs provided 26 figurines of horned quadrupeds.¹⁰⁴ The association of terracotta animal figurines and “feeding bottles” in the same deposits is rarely observed (T. XXII and III),¹⁰⁵ just as that of terracotta animal figurines and female anthropomorphic figurines (T. XXIX, XXXVIII, III).¹⁰⁶ If some terracotta animals may be assigned to children’s burials (T. XXIX, perhaps XXXVIII),¹⁰⁷ most of them cannot be related to a specific individual (T. XIX, XXXVII, XXXVIII, III, IV, XLVI),¹⁰⁸ since primary burials have been frequently disturbed through new interments, and skeletal remains were consequently found in heaps or pushed to the side without having been analysed.

¹⁰⁰ BLEGEN 1937, 256; cited by TZONOU-HERBST 2002, 74. SHELTON 1996, 53-56 (LH IIIA2-III B1). For a chariot model seen as a toy from Ras Shamra (T. LXXXI) see PILALI-PAPASTERIOU 1998, 40. For chariot models “as items conferring prestige rather than simple toys” see VETTERS 2016, 45.

¹⁰¹ BLEGEN 1937, 66-67, 365-366. The chariot models, marked by a ribbon handle passing over the back of the two horses and joining the front side of the box, were designed without wheels.

¹⁰² BLEGEN 1937, 66-67, fig. 132-133, 617-618.

¹⁰³ The large number of children’s burials in LH III B1 (ca. 1320-1250 BC) may also be due to the fact that some of them have been identified on the basis of the grave goods (figurines and miniature vases): SHELTON 1996, 290.

¹⁰⁴ BLEGEN 1937, 361.

¹⁰⁵ BLEGEN 1937, 66 (T. XXII), 184 (T. III). For female anthropomorphic figurines and feeding bottles from the same deposits: T. XII, W-I, XXVII, XXXIII, III.

¹⁰⁶ BLEGEN 1937, 361, T. XXIX: 78, 80, fig. 155, T. XXXVIII-2 deposits: 130-131, fig. 308, T. III-heap: 183-185, fig. 457.

¹⁰⁷ BLEGEN 1937, T. XIX: 78, 80, fig. 155, T. XXXVIII-remains of skull: 129-130, fig. 308.

¹⁰⁸ BLEGEN 1937, T. XIX: 60-61, fig. 114, T. XXXVII: 127-128, fig. 297, T. XXXVIII-heap of bones: 130-131, fig. 308, T. III-heap: 183-185, fig. 457, T. IV: 191-193, fig. 491 and 616, T. XLVI: 222-223, fig. 565 and 613.

Zoomorphic figurines have been predominantly but not exclusively deposited with children's burials at Prosymna, since a fragment of animal figurine was discovered next to a skeleton in contracted position, which apparently was not that of a child, near the back of the chamber of Tomb III.¹⁰⁹ A Late Helladic funerary deposit from Argos may support this observation, since six terracotta figurines (zoomorphic and female anthropomorphic ones) have been unearthed in the sepulchral chamber of a woman (T. XXVII, anthropological analysis by R.P. Charles).¹¹⁰ In these cases, the animal figurines, perhaps deposited as offerings, may allude to daily values or to the wealth of the deceased.

Unlike the previous examples, at Perati in Attica, a Post-palatial cemetery of 219 tombs (Late Helladic IIIC, ca. 1200-1100 BC), small terracotta quadrupeds and female anthropomorphic figurines did not come from the same tombs.¹¹¹ Terracotta quadrupeds (bovine and other animals), discovered in eight tombs of Perati,¹¹² have been assigned by the excavator to children's burials (T. 21, 25, 37, 56, 59, 147, 155; but without bones found in T. Σ57-chamber). Conversely, quadrupeds have been found here in conjunction with other objects possibly related to childhood.¹¹³ In particular, the burials of two adults at least and a child (T. 25) provided two quadrupeds, a terracotta chair model and two feeding bottles, as well as some cone shells.¹¹⁴ This assemblage raises the question whether miniatures (the chair model) and shells can be interpreted as game pieces.

5.2 Assemblages with seashells

According to scholars like N. Hillbom, seashells may be regarded as potential markers or counters, especially ground down and/or lead-filled cone shells.¹¹⁵ The function and use of a large group of cone shells

¹⁰⁹ BLEGEN 1937, T. III-skeleton: 182, 185, fig. 457.

¹¹⁰ DESHAYES 1966, 83-85; noted in POMADÈRE 2018, 65. In the first millennium BC, chariot models in adult's burials may also represent the Ekphora rite or agricultural labour (DASEN 2012, 14).

¹¹¹ IAKOVIDIS 1969-1970; IAKOVIDIS 1980.

¹¹² IAKOVIDIS 1969-1970, A, T. 155: 41-42, 44, T. 147: 118-119, 121, T. 59: 186-187, T. 56: 190-191, T. 37: 324, T. 21: 332, 335-336, T. 25: 337-339, T. Σ57: 448; B, 268-269, Γ, pl. 117, 357, 54στ, 56α, 99ε, 102β, 103δ, 133α; a figurine of a bird in T. Σ23α.

¹¹³ As reminded by B. Carè (2017, 178, n. 34, with previous references), "the actual purpose and symbolic meaning of other 'toys' and 'playthings' have become recently widely debated".

¹¹⁴ IAKOVIDIS 1969-1970, A, 337-338, B, 269, Γ, pl. 103δ.

¹¹⁵ HILLBOM 2005, 279-281. For shells from Perati and Knossos (Unexplored Mansion) see IAKOVIDIS 1970, B, 365; IAKOVIDIS 1980, 98 and REESE 1983, 353, 356; EVELY 1984, 297, n. 168.

discovered in Building Θ in Mycenae are discussed in this volume by Vassiliki Pliatsika.¹¹⁶ The filling with lead is a technical feature also observed on some astragali. In Cyprus, seashells and astragali have both been found in the same Late Bronze Age burial places and sanctuaries,¹¹⁷ as well as in Greek and Cypriot sanctuaries and tombs of the first millennium BC.¹¹⁸ It has been suggested that astragali from sacred areas in Late Bronze Age Cyprus may have served in divination practices.¹¹⁹ Weighted and worked cone shells from cult contexts may have been used for the same purpose, “in some sort of game”.¹²⁰ As pointed out by Pierre Amandry for the use of astragali in oracular practices, “de l’idée de chance au jeu, on passe aisément à celle de faveur du sort”.¹²¹

According to D.S. Reese, “both the holed and unmodified [cone] shells might have been used as gaming pieces or toys [...]” or, as regards holed examples only, as “personal ornaments or some form of fishing or garment weight”.¹²² Seashells are often found in children’s burials ranging from the Late Bronze Age to the Classical times and thus considered “to be appropriate grave gifts for children, having served perhaps as toys in actual life”.¹²³ Conversely, shells have also been deposited with adult individuals, as evidenced in burials of South Italy dating from the Archaic to the Hellenistic period.¹²⁴ This does not preclude a playful destination of the shells, in particular the small ones, but the possibility that shells were used for symbolic purposes should also be considered.¹²⁵

¹¹⁶ REESE 2013, 478-479.

¹¹⁷ REESE 1985, 352-353 (shells), 382-385 (astragali).

¹¹⁸ AMANDRY 1984, 378-379. For shells and astragali in Iron Age tombs at Amathus and Kition (Cyprus) see REESE 1992; REESE 2014.

¹¹⁹ REESE 1985, 353, 389; also, GILMOUR 1997, 272.

¹²⁰ REESE 1985, 353; also 346 (cone shell filled with lead, from below floor III of Temple 2 at Kition).

¹²¹ AMANDRY 1984, 377.

¹²² REESE 1983, 357. For shells as ornaments (Cyprus) see REESE – LERNAU 2018, 543. As regards the shells from Tomb 23 at Hala Sultan Tekke (D.S. Reese), the murex (*Bolinus*) found on the chest of the adult male was certainly worn as a personal ornament, but the function of a *Semicassis* lip remains enigmatic (gaming piece?).

¹²³ GATES 1992, 166, partly quoting IMMERWAHR 1971, 109-110, 208. See STROSZECK 2012, 62, n. 18.

¹²⁴ CARÈ 2018, 149.

¹²⁵ On apotropaic purposes, i.e., to protect the deceased in their last trip see CARÈ 2018, 150. As reminded by this author, shells may have been used as food (accompanying the dead, or consumed in ritual meals), or functioned as ornamental objects, possibly linked to concepts such as fertility and rebirth or having the value of a pre-monetary sign.

At Prosymna, seashells and terracotta animal figurines were recovered in five chamber tombs (*Conus*: T. XXXVIII, III, IV, XIX; “*Fasciolaria*”: T. XXXVII),¹²⁶ whereas another tomb contained cone shells and terracotta female anthropomorphic figurines (T. XXXV),¹²⁷ on a total of eleven tombs that produced seashells (see further, *Conus*: T. I, XXVI, XXXIV, oyster: T. XLIV, *Spondylus*: T. XXV).¹²⁸ However, seashells and terracottas from these tombs were not found together in the same deposits, and none of the deposits that yielded seashells seems to be associated with a child’s burial. This lack of associations may challenge the idea that seashells were used for playing, without excluding the possibility that adults may also have played with seashells. The 38 seashells found in heap on the chamber floor of Tomb XXVI were probably accumulated as a sign of a certain social status, especially as the finds from this tomb include arrowheads.¹²⁹ In addition, most of the cone shells were holed, a feature that may indicate that these shells were worn as ornaments; some of them were also ground down, but none was lead-filled.¹³⁰

By contrast, in the cemetery of Perati in Attica, three of the seashells were lead-filled cones. These shells and others showing a rubbed flat side may have been used for playing.¹³¹ It must be noted that twenty-six tombs at Perati have provided more than 400 seashells, mostly cone ones, found in association with children’s burials in about half of the cases, according to Spýros E. Iakovidis.¹³² In five of these tombs (T. 21, 25, 37, 56, Σ57), the same deposits yielded also terracotta quadrupeds (Fig. 8).¹³³ These tombs contained children’s bones, except in T. Σ57, as seen above. This raises the

¹²⁶ BLEGEN 1937, 465, T. XIX: 61, T. XXXVIII: 130, T. III: fig. 463, IV: fig. 492; also T. XXXVII: 127-128, with a feeding bottle. The “*Fasciolaria*” from Tomb XXXVII is in fact a *Hexaplex* and the “clam” from Tomb XXV a *Spondylus* (D.S. Reese).

¹²⁷ BLEGEN 1937, 465, Cist III: 119, for another figurine: Cist II.

¹²⁸ BLEGEN 1937, 465, T. I: 72, T. XXVI: 94, 97, fig. 212, T. XXXIV: 113, 116, fig. 263, T. XXXV: 119; T. XLIV: 214; T. XXV: 88; also feeding bottles in T. I and XXV, as well as in T. XXXIV-Cist IV, and a head of female figurine in the dromos of T. XLIV.

¹²⁹ BLEGEN 1937, 94, 98.

¹³⁰ REESE 1983, 357, table 1.

¹³¹ IAKOVIDIS 1970, B, 365, 461-462.

¹³² IAKOVIDIS 1970, B, 365; *Id.* 1980, 98. T. 7, 12, 21, 25, 33a, 36, 37, 46a, 54, 56, 74, 78, 100, 104, 109, 113, 116, 119, 131, 133, 134, 143, Σ3, Σ23a, Σ24, Σ57; two deposits in T. 100 and Σ3. For cones see REESE 1983, 356: “over 338 are present from fourteen tombs”. For the children’s burials see POMADÈRE 2018, 69, n. 43.

¹³³ IAKOVIDIS 1969, A, T. 21: 332, T. 25: 337, T. 37: 324, T. 56: 190-191, T. Σ57: 448; *Id.* 1970, B, 268-269.

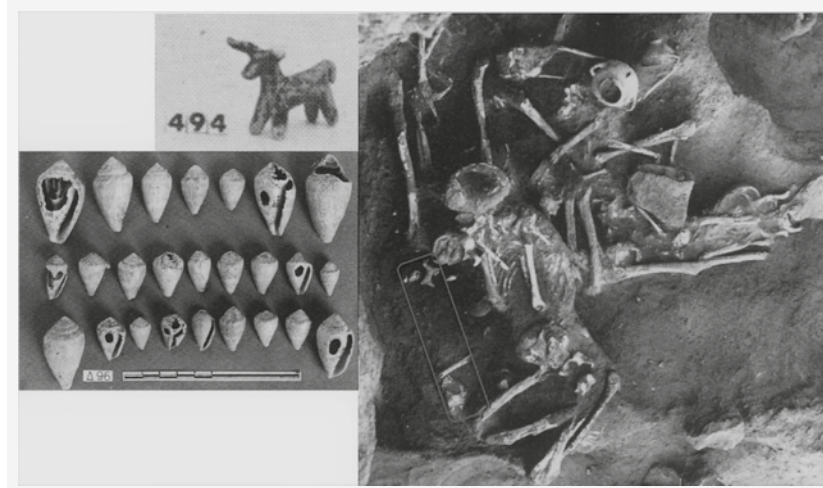


Fig. 8

question whether new gaming practices and funerary beliefs have emerged on the southern Greek mainland between the Palatial period, when chamber tombs were in use at Prosymna, and the Post-palatial period, in the era of the cemetery of Perati.

Despite the lack of bones, Tomb Σ57 yielded a noteworthy assemblage of objects plausibly related to childhood, including a cone shell, a feeding bottle and a small jug (Σ57α-niche),¹³⁴ as well as fragments of an animal figurine (Σ57α-chamber). Another relevant assemblage from Perati (Tomb 25), where at least two burials (adult and child) have been revealed, would give a perfect picture of toys and game markers gathered for the burial of a child (quadrupeds, chair model, feeding bottles, shells).¹³⁵

However, even in this cemetery, seashells were not exclusively found in tombs that contained objects related to childhood or burials of children (T. 12: bronze sword and knife; T. Σ24: bronze cleaver; both tombs without skeletal remains of children identified).¹³⁶ Moreover, it has been ruled out that these shells, possibly used as beads or buttons, have functioned as amulets because of their high number observed in some tombs of this cemetery.¹³⁷ One may wonder why 152 holed but not lead-filled cone shells, perhaps all belonging to the deceased, have been deposited in Tomb 131 at

¹³⁴ IAKOVIDIS 1969, A, 447-448, Γ, pl. 133α.

¹³⁵ IAKOVIDIS 1969, A, 337-338, Γ, pl. 103δ.

¹³⁶ IAKOVIDIS 1969, A, 305-307, 369-370, Γ, pl. 94β, 95β-γ, 110β-γ.

¹³⁷ IAKOVIDIS 1970, B, 364-365; KARALI 1999, 42.

Perati (ca. 1200-1100 BC), a tomb that also yielded lead fragments regarded as net weights by S.E. Iakovidis.¹³⁸

The point here is not to provide an extensive review of seashells found in Late Helladic tombs,¹³⁹ but to note the diversity of the funerary assemblages that included seashells and/or terracotta animal figurines, and the resulting range of plausible interpretations. For instance, in the cemetery of Kolonaki at Thebes (Boeotia), one chamber tomb contained a terracotta quadruped and a lead-filled shell, another one also a quadruped together with female anthropomorphic figurines and throne models.¹⁴⁰ No conclusive evidence about their function can be drawn from these assemblages, but I would not exclude the possibility that these objects were initially used for playing before having been deposited in the tombs. As pointed out above, it would be interesting to find traces of wear or repair on these objects, as one may expect with toys. The question remains open in the case of Chalkis-*Vromousa* (Euboea), where about twenty seashells but no terracotta animal figurines have been brought to light.¹⁴¹

Conclusion

To sum up, it must be assumed that the function and use of animal figurines varied significantly according to their material, shape and specific features. Small pierced faience, stone or gold animals in a couchant position, such as the faience bovine animal from Katsambas (Tomb H), have certainly been worn as beads or pendants. These small animals were valuable goods, as were the gaming pieces (ivory and stone cones, astragalus) from the same burial of a child at Katsambas. Despite the trade contacts with Egypt attested through the presence of imported stone vases in the cemetery of Katsamba (ca. 1450-1370 BC),¹⁴² the idea that the dot-marked astragalus and cone-shaped gaming pieces from Tomb H would have embodied beliefs related to gaming practices similar to the Egyptian

¹³⁸ IAKOVIDIS 1969-1970, A, 453, 455, B, 364-365, 460-461, Γ, pl. 135.

¹³⁹ For cone shells from various LBA contexts see KARALI 1999, 61-62. For a Thessalian example (Dimini, Tomb 1, LH IIB-III A1) see ADRYMI-SISMANI 2014, 314, 767.

¹⁴⁰ KERAMOPOULLOS 1917, T. 21: 182-183, fig. 130, T. 25: 190, fig. 135.

¹⁴¹ HANKEY 1952, 87, 95.

¹⁴² ALEXIOU 1967, 46, pl. 10-11a (Tomb B); PHILLIPS 2008, II, 67-69 (Tombs B and H). For (traded or made in the Aegean) blue frit used to decorate Tomb H see PANAGIOTAKI 2008: 48; see ALEXIOU 1967, 35-36.

funerary ones is however only conjectural.¹⁴³ Furthermore, it is impossible to demonstrate that the Katsambas gaming pieces have been used in a ritualized game performed at the funeral, due to the lack of other game pieces and boards in Aegean funerary contexts.¹⁴⁴ While stone slabs with depressions in Cyprus have been found in various sites and contexts,¹⁴⁵ the identification of such slabs as game boards in the Aegean is another much-debated issue. This identification has been seriously challenged and often refuted, since the number of holes/depressions and design on stone slabs do not correspond to the patterns of well-known games in Egypt, Cyprus and the Levant.¹⁴⁶

In the Aegean Bronze Age, the small couchant animals of faience, gold or stone may have been deposited as votive offerings in cult places, used as pendants or amulets, or perhaps fixed on boxes. There is no evidence that these boxes may have been game boards or that these animals were used as “counters”. It is so far impossible to connect the small pierced couchant quadrupeds of the Aegean Late Bronze Age, made in various materials, to Egyptian ivory lions used as gaming pieces of the Old Kingdom period. The Aegean pierced examples were obviously intended to be worn. The question then is whether personal ornaments in the shape of animals may have functioned as amulets with symbolic values linked to gaming practices in the Aegean.

Bulls were animals extensively represented in the Aegean iconographic repertoire throughout the Bronze Age, and their images were largely diffused in the Levant and Cyprus as well. The representation of recumbent

¹⁴³ On Egyptian funerary beliefs, passage and netherworld related to gaming practices in the Bronze Age see CRIST – DUNN-VATURI – DE VOOGT 2016, 15, 31, 33, 66, 52, 54-55, 120; WHITTAKER 2002, 80-81; CUCUZZA 2010, 136. The situation is different as regards Egyptian ritualized playing of agonistic sports and ceremonial performances depicted on the walls of Bronze Age mortuary monuments, “in the context of the rejuvenation and deification of the king” (see MORGAN 2018, esp. 223).

¹⁴⁴ The architectural stone of the Royal Tomb at Isopata, marked with a 3x10 design similar to the *senet* game, was likely reused as a vertically inserted block in the construction of the tomb (HILLBOM 2005, 104-109, for ritualized games, p. 122-123). On the ritual function of the stones with depressions found in Minoan funerary contexts see WHITTAKER 2002, 77-79.

¹⁴⁵ CRIST – DUNN-VATURI – DE VOOGT 2016, 74-77.

¹⁴⁶ For plausible Minoan game boards see HILLBOM 2005, 109; reviewed by SCHÄDLER 2008, 293-294. For a lack of evidence, but with doubt at Zakros and Knossos-Isopata (*mehen*, *senet*) see CRIST – DUNN-VATURI – DE VOOGT 2016, 36-37; DUNN-VATURI – CRIST – DE VOOGT 2017, 2. For a ritual use of the *kernoi* on Mount Juktas (Minoan) see KARETSOU 2012, 89 and fig. 10.12. Hence, the pebbles found in the same layer of kernos 1 have not been used for playing. For Dimini (Thessaly), room of *Megaron B* see ADRYMI-SISMANI 2014, 202; discussion in CUCUZZA 2010, 142.

bulls in the Eastern Mediterranean may be interpreted as the result of more entangled cultural traditions. Adapted and reinvented in the Late Bronze Age, their representation was an integral part of the “International Style”, as illustrated by the famous ivory game board of 20-squares from Tomb 58 of Enkomi.¹⁴⁷ Thus, the discovery of beads in the form of compact recumbent bovine animals of faience or gold in two Late Helladic chamber tombs at Mycenae (see above), together with gold and faience ornaments in the shape of biconical seashells (*Πορφύρα/Stramonita haemastoma*),¹⁴⁸ was certainly no mere coincidence. It has been argued in this article that seashells and their images, in particular cone shells, may also have been linked to the notion of chance and fate in Cypriot and Aegean contexts. This interpretation is in line with the development of intense intercultural contacts in the Eastern Mediterranean. As valuable goods, these pieces of jewellery were associated with the burials of the elites.

In Mycenaean contexts (ca. 1400-1100 BC), however, the zoomorphic figurines found in the same tombs as cone shells are usually terracotta standing quadrupeds and not couchant ones. Terracotta standing animals may have reflected daily realities or the wealth of a family, and thus values different from the couchant animals, except perhaps in the case of perforated items used as amulets.¹⁴⁹ In cult places, terracotta animals may have been brought as votive offerings with the purpose of attracting divine protection for the livestock. When found in children’s burials, small standing bovine animals and chariot models may have represented unfulfilled social and family expectations. It is not impossible that terracotta animals were used as toys during lifetime, although only traces of wear or repair could confirm this hypothesis, especially when they are associated with other objects related to childhood, as was the case in the cemeteries of Prosymna and Perati. This association is however too rarely observed in Late Bronze Age funerary contexts for providing a definitive and global answer on this issue.

¹⁴⁷ COURTOIS – LAGARCE 1986, 137-138; also MURRAY – SMITH – WALTERS 1900, 12-14, fig. 19, p. 31, pl. I. British Museum. POURSAT 2014, 198, fig. 160a.

¹⁴⁸ XENAKI-SAKELLARIOU 1985, 179 (small glass squares, some with shells *Πορφύρα* [*Hexaplex trunculus*] in relief), 180-181 (faience and gold shells, gold animal), pls. 74, 76 (T. 58), and 233 (glass shell, faience animals), pls. 110, 111 (T. 82), for the shell motifs, p. 307. For a stone mould from Poros (Crete) with a couchant quadruped and a seashell (*Στροιδί/Ostrea edulis*) see n. 45.

¹⁴⁹ For an unusual pierced terracotta quadruped, very different in shape from the unpierced ones, and real cone shells from tombs 1 and 3 in Mycenae-*Asprochomatos-Agrisykias* see XENAKI-SAKELLARIOU 1985, 53, 58, pl. 1 and 3.

Illustrations

Fig. 1. Astragalus and cones from Katsambas (Tomb H) at the Heraklion Archaeological Museum (© Heraklion Archaeological Museum, 349, 347, 348, 2891, 2892).

Fig. 2. Faience animal (pendant) from Katsambas (Tomb H) at the Heraklion Archaeological Museum (© Heraklion Archaeological Museum, 350).

Fig. 3. Faience bulls or cows (beads/pendants) from Mycenae-*Kalkani* (Tomb 82) at the National Archaeological Museum of Athens (© National Archaeological Museum of Athens, Φ 3124).

Fig. 4. Carnelian sphinx, couchant lion and cone shell skeuomorph (pendants) from the settlement at Enkomi. After Courtois 1984, pl. XVI, 9, 12, 20.

Fig. 5. Ivory lion's head and bull's leg found in a goblet at Phaistos (Room LI), a holed steatite quadruped (pendant) and an astragalus from the same room (various scales). After Levi 1952-54, 412, fig. 32, 414, fig. 36; Levi 1976, 217, fig. 336.

Fig. 6. Bronze couchant animals (weights) from Building III at Kalavassos-*Ayios Dhimitrios*. After South – Russell – Schuster Keswani 1989, K-AD 441-454, plate facing the contents.

Fig. 7. Terracotta animal figurines, chariot models and pottery from Prosymna (Tomb XXII). After Blegen 1937, fig. 131, 133, pl. 8.

Fig. 8. Terracotta animal figurine and cone shells from Perati (Tomb 56, burial marked by a rectangular frame). After Iakovidis 1969, Γ, pl. 55β, 56α, β.

Abbreviations

CMS = *Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel*

CMS II 3 = Platon N. – Pini I. 1984. *Iraklion Archäologisches Museum. Teil 3. Die Siegel der Neupalastzeit*, Berlin.

CMS V Suppl. 1B = Pini I. *et alii* 1993. *Kleinere griechische Sammlungen. Supplementum 1B. Lamia – Zakynthos und weitere Länder des Ostmittelmeerraums*, Berlin.

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Why so serious? An extraordinary cone shell group from Mycenae and the problem of identifying Mycenaean board gaming material

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Abstract. In 1974 in Room Θ3 of House Θ in the Southwest Quarter of the Mycenae citadel, an extraordinary find came to light: 545 *conus mediterraneus ventricosus* shells were found together with 12 small objects in a crevice of the bedrock. 353 cones were intentionally pierced and ground, and 9 of them were filled with lead. This assemblage includes the largest collection of cone shells known from the Late Bronze Age Aegean, and it is now possible to attempt an interpretation of its use, after the publication of the Southwest Quarter excavation. The find is examined in detail, in comparison to other large cone shell groups from Mycenaean contexts. The facts suggest that the Θ3 assemblage artefacts could have been markers for a kind of game, for which games of strategy, skill and chance known in the Eastern Mediterranean, are suggested as possible candidates. Under this hypothesis, context finds from the Room Θ3 deposit are also examined. This study highlights the difficulty in identifying the material remains of board games, as well as the need to include the game – being a basic human activity- in the potential interpretations of archaeological records from the Mycenaean period.

Cone shells, board games, gaming pieces, Mycenaean, Late Bronze Age

Περίληψη. Το 1974 στο Δωμάτιο Θ3 της Οικίας Θ στην Νοτιοδυτική Συνοικία της ακρόπολης των Μυκηνών, ένα εκπληκτικό εύρημα ήρθε στο φως: 545 όστρεα *conus mediterraneus ventricosus* βρέθηκαν μαζί με 12 μικρά αντικείμενα σε μια σχισμή του βράχου. 353 κώνοι έφεραν σκοπίμως οπή και είχαν λειανθεί, ενώ 9 εξ αυτών βρέθηκαν γεμισμένοι με μόλυβδο. Το σύνολο αυτό περιλαμβάνει τη μεγαλύτερη συλλογή κώνων που είναι γνωστή από την Ύστερη Εποχή του Χαλκού στο Αιγαίο, και είναι πλέον δυνατόν να επιχειρηθεί η ερμηνεία της χρήσης του, μετά τη δημοσίευση της ανασκαφής της Νοτιοδυτικής Συνοικίας. Το εύρημα παρουσιάζεται λεπτομερώς σε σύγκριση με άλλες μεγάλες ομάδες κώνων από μυκηναϊκά σύνολα. Τα δεδομένα υποδεικνύουν ότι τα μικρά αντικείμενα του Δωματίου Θ3 θα μπορούσαν να είναι πεσσοί κάποιου είδους παιχνιδιού, για το οποίο ως πιθανοί υποψήφιοι προτείνονται παιχνίδια στρατηγικής, δεξιότητας και τύχης γνωστά στην Ανατολική Μεσόγειο. Υπό το πρίσμα αυτής της υπόθεσης, εξετάζονται επίσης τα συνευρήματα του Δωματίου Θ3. Η μελέτη αυτή υπογραμμίζει τη δυσκολία της ταύτισης των υλικών καταλοίπων των επιτραπέζιων παιχνιδιών, καθώς και την ανάγκη να συμπεριληφθεί το παιχνίδι -ως βασική ανθρώπινη δραστηριότητα- στις πιθανές ερμηνείες των αρχαιολογικών ευρημάτων της μυκηναϊκής περιόδου.

Κώνοι, επιτραπέζια παιχνίδια, πεσσοί, μυκηναϊκό, Ύστερη Εποχή του Χαλκού

Riassunto. Nel 1974, nel Vano Θ3 della Casa Θ, nel Quartiere Sud-Ovest della cittadella di Micene, fu effettuato un ritrovamento straordinario: 545 conchiglie della specie *conus mediterraneus ventricosus* furono scoperte insieme a 12 piccoli oggetti in una fessura della roccia. 353 conchiglie erano state intenzionalmente forate e lisciate e 9 di esse erano state riempite di piombo. Questo deposito costituisce la più grande raccolta conosciuta di conchiglie della specie *conus* provenienti dall'Egeo della tarda Età del Bronzo e, a seguito della pubblicazione dello scavo del Quartiere Sud-Ovest, è ora possibile tentare un'interpretazione della sua funzione. Il complesso di reperti viene esaminato in dettaglio ed in confronto con altri grandi lotti di conchiglie della stessa specie provenienti da contesti micenei. I dati suggeriscono che i manufatti del Vano Θ3 potrebbero essere interpretati come strumenti di qualche gioco da tavolo, tra i quali i giochi di strategia, abilità e fortuna conosciuti nel Mediterraneo orientale sono suggeriti come possibili candidati. Alla luce di questa ipotesi, vengono esaminati anche gli altri reperti rinvenuti nel contesto del vano Θ3. Questo studio evidenzia la difficoltà di identificare i resti materiali dei giochi da tavolo, così come la necessità di includere il gioco – tra le primarie attività umane – nelle potenziali interpretazioni dei documenti archeologici del periodo miceneo.

Conchiglie a cono, giochi da tavolo, strumenti di gioco, periodo miceneo, tarda Età del Bronzo

1. The cone shell group

From 1951 up to his death in 1988, George E. Mylonas directed a major excavation and restoration program inside the citadel of Mycenae and in the surrounding area.¹ Previous excavations in the late 19th century by Heinrich Schliemann, Panagiotis Stamatakis² and Christos Tsountas,³ were poorly documented in publications, thus G.E. Mylonas' main research goal was to recount the archaeological history of this legendary site and clarify several issues which remained unresolved.

In 1966 G.E. Mylonas began the excavation of the Southwest Quarter of the Mycenae citadel. This large quarter extended in the south part of the west slope of the Mycenae hill, covering an area of 2,200 square meters, densely built in the mid-13th century BC, after the construction of the west leg of the Cyclopean wall in this area. It comprised eleven buildings and complexes of essentially residential use, communicating with each other through a system of corridors and stairways.⁴

In 1974 he focused excavation work on Building Θ, consisting of seven rooms preserved in the basement level with high walls (Fig. 1).⁵ The central basement room of the building was Θ3, a small square room of 13.5 square meters, communicating towards the west with a side corridor, through a small staircase ascending from the floor level. The floor surface was uneven with a difference of 78 cm slanting from east to west, because of the protruding natural bedrock, which had not been evened out. The room had no

¹ I would like to thank Alkestis Papadimitriou and my colleague Vassiliki Papadimitropoulou at the Ephorate of Antiquities of Argolis and Konstantinos Nikolentzos at the National Archaeological Museum (henceforth NAM) for permission to study and facilitating my research. I am grateful to Jacqueline S. Meier for identifying the fossil astragalus and her contribution in this paper. Warm thanks are due to David S. Reese for generously sharing his knowledge on ancient shells and Konstantinos Syrgiannis for elucidating questions on gaming. Special thanks are due to the organisers of the Board Game Conference in Athens and especially to the editors of this volume Barbara Caré, Véronique Dasen and Ulrich Schädler for their most helpful comments.

ΜΥΛΩΝΑΣ 1983; ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ 1989; ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ 2013.

² Though H. Schliemann only worked for a period of four months in Mycenae, he excavated extensively, both inside the Mycenae citadel (focusing on the Grace Circle A) and outside, in the Clytemnestra tholos tomb, employing a large number of workmen. SCHLIEMANN 1878. P. Stamatakis continued work at Mycenae in Grave Circle A and the Atreus tholos tomb. For a recount of the excavations at Mycenae from 1870 to 1878 see ΒΑΣΙΛΙΚΟΥ 2011, esp. 80-188.

³ C. Tsountas began work at Mycenae in 1886, excavating extensively inside the citadel, in tholos tombs and chamber tomb cemeteries in the surrounding hills. SHELTON 2006.

⁴ ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 1-6.

⁵ ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 302-389.

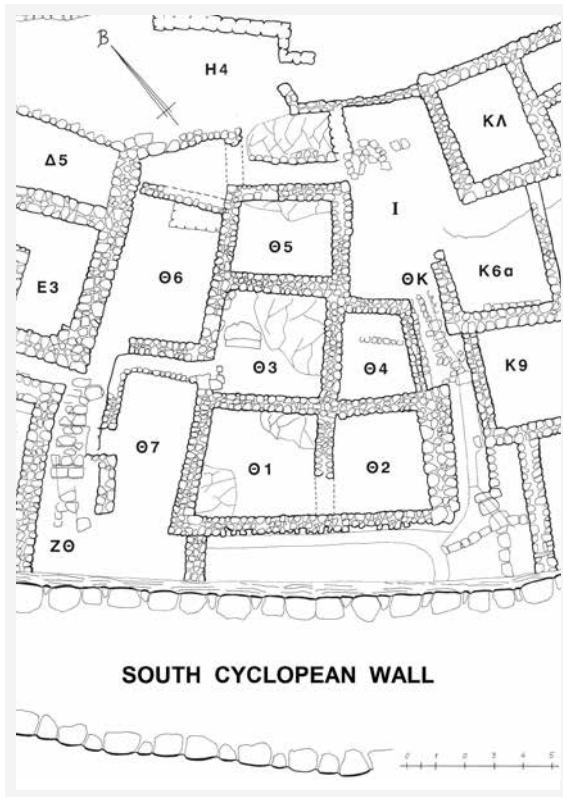


Fig. 1

discerned in the deposit: a level with very few building remains, dating after the abandonment of the room, a level of the collapse of the roof and the upper floor including burnt earth and bricks, and the fill of the room extending to the floor. What is most interesting is the fact that no major changes are diagnosed in the pottery of the three levels, all dating from the mid to the late 13th century BC. This speaks for the short-lived use of the building, which is true for all of the Southwest Quarter, attributed to the effect of a major destruction event which took place at Mycenae in the late 13th century (Late Helladic IIIB2 late), evidenced in various areas of the Mycenae citadel. The room fill included an array of vessel shapes, with tableware predominating, the most popular being the kylikes, shallow cups, angular bowls, deep bowls, stirrup jars and jugs.

⁶ ΙΑΚΩΒΙΑΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 330-331

⁷ ΙΑΚΩΒΙΑΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 331-389.

special architectural features, but for a kind of bench formed in the south-west corner by covering the bedrock with lime plaster.⁶ Θ3 was previously unexcavated by C. Tsountas who had worked in the area, thus G.E. Mylonas had the rare opportunity to unearth its original deposit consisting of a large quantity of pottery sherds and a variety of small finds.⁷ I will comment briefly on the nature of the deposit, as soon as I stress here that its general character was typical for this residential area of the Mycenae citadel. This practically means that no obvious specific use could be attributed to Room Θ3 or to the whole Building Θ for that matter, for example cult or secular ritual activities, industrial, storage, cooking etc.

Three distinct levels could be dis-

The most extraordinary find in Θ3, lying *in situ* in a crevice of the bed-rock in the centre of the room, was an assemblage of 545 *Conus ventricosus mediterraneus* shells (Fig. 2),⁸ found together with 12 small lead objects (Figs. 4-5). The shells and lead objects were evidently stored in an organic container, probably a cloth or leather bag, as they were all found packed together and not scattered about the deposit as per usual in such contexts.⁹ Out of the total of 545 shells, 192 were left unmodified, in their natural state, while the remaining 353 had a flat surface and a hole on the labial side, next to their aperture.¹⁰ Out of these 353 ground and pierced shells, 9 were filled with lead and there was evidence that some of the rest had been filled with red clay, which is now practically worn out¹¹ (Table 1). The cone shells ranged from 1.7 to 4.9 cm in length, were light pink to light beige in colour and were preserved in fairly good condition.

Careful examination revealed that the modification of the shells was a time-consuming task, demanding precision, performed even in the smallest shells measuring 1 or 2 cm long, and may be described as follows: the shell was ground on its labial side, against a rough, probably stone surface. Once a small hole was formed, a pointed, probably metal tool was used to broaden the hole, sometimes forming a carefully made square opening. Subsequently the spine within the shell was crushed and removed, so the body was left hollow. Hollowing the shell was evidently the goal and not just creating a flat surface, as has been previously assumed.

The nine lead-filled cones range in size (Fig. 3), from the smallest being 1.8 cm long to the largest of 4.4 cm, and accordingly in corresponding

⁸ Mycenae Museum (henceforth MM) inv. no. 14267. Found on August 8, 1974, at a depth of 1.65 m. from the surface of the slope. MYAONAE 1974, 89-90, REESE 1982, 126-128, REESE 1983, 354-357, IAKOVIDIS *et alii* 2013, 372-374, REESE in IAKOVIDIS *et alii* 2013, 478, 489-493. The total number differs in all cases where the shells were studied. G.E. Mylonas mentions 550 in 1974, D.S. Reese in 1982 and 1983 mentions 542, S. Iakovidis in 2013 mentions 545, D.S. Reese in the same volume mentions 537. I personally studied the material in 2001 and again in 2018 counting 545 cone shells. IAKOVIDIS *et alii* 2013, 374, fn. 735, comments on this discrepancy attributing it to the movement of the material from the excavation at Mycenae to Nafplion Museum for storing and then back to the Mycenae Museum, where it is currently stored. This small discrepancy does not affect the validity of the views expressed by all scholars who studied the material.

⁹ Perhaps even a wicker basket or a wooden box. It was noted that no soil was found among the shells, so they must have been stored tight together. IAKOVIDIS *et alii* 2013, 372.

¹⁰ Out of the 353, 4 were ground, but without a hole.

¹¹ The 2001 study mentioned specifically 102 shells filled with clay, but consistent study in 2018 revealed that only few traces of clay could be discerned in a handful of shells and some red clay was present in the bag of shells.



Figs. 2-3

weight, from 5 to 63 grams (Table 2). The lead-filled cones are not always heavier than the hollow ones (as one would assume), they may even be lighter. This practically means that the lead-filled cones do not form a special category where they were overall differentiated by weight in relation to the hollow shells. The lead was poured through the intentionally formed hole and spread to fill the hollow shell, in one case overflowing through the labial opening. Red clay was used to seal the hole. In one case the shell is completely broken away and lost, so only the lead filling is preserved, having taken the inner form of the cone.

The *Conus ventricosus mediterraneus* shell is a subspecies of *Conus ventricosus* indigenous to the Mediterranean Sea, found in rocky bottoms on stones and slates, reaching a maximum of 6.5 cm in length.¹² The shell is glossy pink to light beige in colour with occasional striations, making it attractive and popular with collectors even today. It hosts an inedible venomous snail, which is why it must be handled with caution, as stinging or consumption may cause neurological paralysis or even death;¹³ thus, it could not have been used for dietary reasons or as fish bait in antiquity. The gastropod is also carnivorous, feeding on other molluscs by penetrating their shells. This explains the small holes detected on many cone shells, which at times look deceptively man-made and should not confuse scholars looking for man-made traits to identify modified shells.¹⁴

¹² A gastropod mollusc of the Conidae Family. GMELIN 1791, 3397 (*ventricosus*); HWASS in BRUGUIÈRE 1792, 701-702 (*mediterraneus*); DELAMOTTE – VARDALA – THEODOROU 2001, 136, 237.

¹³ NICOL 1964, 373; DELAMOTTE – VARDALA – THEODOROU 2001, 236-237; HADDAD JR 2009; ΒΕΡΟΠΟΥΛΑΟΥ 2011, 41. Current biochemical research focuses on the exploitation of cone venom (Conotoxins or *conopeptidae*) in pharmacology and medical applications. RAYBAUDI MASSILIA *et alii* 2001; ROMEO *et alii* 2008. LEWIS *et alii* 2012.

¹⁴ Holes on the top of the shells may also be caused by breaking and wear. DELAMOTTE – VARDALA – THEODOROU 2001, 50-51; ΒΕΡΟΠΟΥΛΑΟΥ 2011, 47-49; THEODOROPOULOU 2014, 84; RIDOUT – SHARPE 2017.

Cones appear in the Neolithic and Bronze Age Aegean archaeological records in domestic and occasionally in ritual contexts, but more commonly as grave offerings,¹⁵ in some cases associated with child burials.¹⁶ Depending on the context, they have been variously interpreted as gaming markers¹⁷ or toys, personal ornaments, amulets or fishing weights, or even as symbols of the sea or childhood.¹⁸

2. Comparative evidence

As a rule, the cone shells appear in Mycenaean contexts, in very small numbers, even with a single specimen. The 545 Mycenae Building Θ cones form a unique case,¹⁹ constituting the largest, by far, collection ever found in any Bronze Age Aegean site. Such an exceptional number of an uncommon inedible species indicates special care in procuring them for a specific function.

The only comparable group of cone shells deriving also from a Late Bronze Age archaeological context, was found beyond the Aegean, at Hala Sultan Tekke in Cyprus. 540 cone shells came from Area 8 of the settlement, from a 12th century BC layer, but unfortunately more information on their use is lacking.²⁰ Their number is strikingly similar to the Mycenae Theta 3 (Θ3) group, however at Hala Sultan Tekke only two of the shells were modified (they were just grounded, but not pierced), therefore one cannot be certain whether both these large shell groups had a similar function.

Groups of numerous cone shells collected from a single context mainly derive from palatial and post-palatial burials in Mycenaean chamber tombs

¹⁵ For a full list of cone shells found in Bronze Age contexts in the Aegean, Cyprus and Israel see REESE in EVELY 2006, CD 25-28.

¹⁶ ΠΟΛΥΧΡΟΝΑΚΟΥ – ΣΓΟΥΡΙΤΣΑ 1987, 22, 24; ΒΛΑΧΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ 2006, 330-331; ΒΛΑΧΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ 2012, 58. See also ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ 1969-1970, vol. B, 364-366.

¹⁷ In this paper I follow HILLBOM 2005, 62, on the terminology of small gaming implements. “Markers” and “counters” are small low pieces, natural or man-made, marking spots on a board game, “pieces” are man-made, standing up objects (height > width) that move or may be knocked over on a board game, “tiles” are flat objects, having special features and a more active role, a “die” may be any kind of random generator object.

¹⁸ ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ 1969-1970, vol. B, 365-366; REESE 1982, 125, 129; REESE 1983, 353, 356; ΒΛΑΧΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ 2006, 330-331. EVELY in PORHAM *et alii* 1984, 246-247, and 296: fn 166.

¹⁹ One or two ground (and sometimes pierced) cone shells appear sporadically in various areas inside the citadel of Mycenae. REESE in ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 478-479; D.S. Reese *pers. comm.*

²⁰ Excavated in 1979, they were found in the Late Cypriot IIIA1 (12th c. BC) Layer 4 F 1350A (from bench F 1350). Excavation data for Area 8 have not been published. REESE – LERNAU 2018, 493, 537.

from Mycenae and Prosymna in the Argolid, and Perati in Attica. These groups form the closest Mycenaean parallels to the Building Θ cone assemblage, so I examined all of them, as well as most of the singular lead-filled specimens, looking for analogies, differences and traits which could illuminate the interpretation of the unique Building Θ find from Mycenae.²¹

The association of cone shells with children and gaming was established through the Perati cemetery finds, where the excavator, Spyridon Iakovidis, detected a pattern in furnishing child burials with cone shells.²² He believed that the cone shells were used in a children's game, played with an unlimited number of counters. He thought they were intentionally flattened on one side, to land on it when rolled or thrown, and that the lead-filled examples were made to be more stable and harder to roll. Though more specific rules could not be deduced, S. Iakovidis imagined a game recalling the one played with astragali in ancient Greece or modern-day marbles.²³

This was indeed an intriguing interpretation and most importantly a rare case of identifying gaming material in the Mycenaean world. S. Iakovidis' suggestion of the existence of such a game is used here as a working hypothesis, further investigated with a comparative analysis of the available evidence. As we have already seen in the Mycenae Θ3 cone shell group, the goal in the modification process was not merely to create a flat surface, but rather to create a pierced and hollow shell, which would evidently differentiate it from the natural unmodified pieces and the lead-filled ones. So, this hypothetical game could ultimately involve three categories of counters: the natural shells, the hollow ones and the lead-filled ones.

Coming back to Perati in Attica, it was observed that in the total of the 217 tombs, there were 26 tombs with 28 burials, where ca. 400 shells were used as offerings (the vast majority being cone shells) –²⁴ an indication that this was not a common custom, but rather a specialized one. Out of the 28 burials with shells, 14 certainly belonged to children, and possibly

²¹ The groups of cone shells from Mycenae, Prosymna and Perati studied and presented here are stored in the NAM.

²² ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ 1969-1970, vol. B, 364.

²³ ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ 1969-1970, vol. B, 365.

²⁴ ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ 1969-1970, vol. B, 364: at least 338 *conus mediterraneus*, 8 *cypraea*, 3 *cardium*, 1 *pectunculus (axinea) violacescens*, 1 *haliotis tuberculata*, 1 *murex*, 1 *melania*.

4 more, and only one could safely be attributed to an adult person, the others belonging to unidentified individuals.

In most burials in Perati, where cones were found as grave offerings, there are single specimens, or up to 6 cones per tomb.²⁵ But there are seven exceptional contexts, where a notably large group of cones was offered and five of these were certainly associated with child burials – perhaps even a sixth, with the seventh being unidentified.²⁶ These burials were placed either in a small niche in the dromos wall, or in a pit in the chamber tomb floor. The cones were found in various positions in relation to the skeleton, either forming a layer under the bones, or spread over them, or gathered at the feet together with other finds. In one case, an impressive total of 160 cones were used to cover the bones inside a pit burial by the southeast corner of the chamber.²⁷

The study of the Perati cone shell groups asserted that the treatment of the modified shells was similar to that from Mycenae, as in grinding, forming a hole and hollowing the shell, while there are also very few lead-filled examples. All the cone shells found in Perati were worn, fragile, and some of them broken and bearing post-mortem mollusc holes, all evidence that these shells were collected on the beach.²⁸ By comparison, the Mycenae Θ3 shells were visibly in a much better state, though a lot of them – if not all – must have been beach-collected too.

At Prosymna, a small settlement close to Mycenae, 58 cones were placed as offerings in eight tombs.²⁹ One case stands out, in chamber tomb XXVI,

²⁵ ΙΑΚΩΒΙΑΔΗΣ 1969-1970, vol. A, 123-127, pl. 38b [tomb 149: 1 cone (Δ210)], 175-178 (tomb Σ3: 6 cones), 197-199, pl. 60a [tomb 100: 2 lead-filled cones (Δ139)], 269-270, pl. 78b [tomb 46a: 3 cones (Δ93)], 304-314, pl. 94b [tomb 12: 3 cones (Δ30)], 324, pl. 99d [tomb 37: 4 cones (Δ91)], 331-336 [tomb 21: 5 cones (Δ60)], 337-339 (tomb 25: few cones), 368-370, pl. 110b [tomb Σ24: 6 cones (Δ102)], 380 (tomb 7: 2-3 cones), 380-382, pl. 113e [tomb 104: 4 cones (Δ141)], 385-386, pl. 114d [tomb 109: 1 cone (Δ150)], 409-411, pl. 122b [tomb 113: 3 cones (Δ153)], 447-448 (tomb Σ57a: 1 cone).

²⁶ Associated with child burials, ΙΑΚΩΒΙΑΔΗΣ 1969-1970, vol. A, 189-191, pl. 56b [tomb 56: 25 cones (Δ96)-NAM inv. no. 8238], 364-366, pl. 109b-c [tomb Σ23a: 38 cones (Δ101) - NAM inv. no. 8249], 379-380, pl. 113a [tomb 54: 61 cones (Δ137) - NAM inv. no. 8722] (60 found in NAM), 416-418, pl. 124a [tomb 119: 11 cones (Δ161) - NAM inv. no. 8780], 451-455, pl. 135a [tomb 131: 162 cones (Δ172) - NAM inv. no. 8797] (160 found in NAM). Probably associated with child burial, ΙΑΚΩΒΙΑΔΗΣ 1969-1970 275-279, pl. 80b [tomb 36: 13 cones (Δ89) - NAM inv. no. 8222]. Unidentified burial, ΙΑΚΩΒΙΑΔΗΣ 1969-1970 457-458, pl. 136b [tomb 133: 11 cones (Δ175) - NAM inv. no. 8834].

²⁷ ΙΑΚΩΒΙΑΔΗΣ 1969-1970, vol. A, 451-455, pl. 135a (tomb 131). 162 cone shells are mentioned in the publication (Δ172), but 160 were found in the NAM (inv. no. 8797).

²⁸ ΒΕΡΟΠΟΥΛΙΔΟΥ 2011, 49-50; ΤΗΟΔΟΡΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ 2014, 77-78; RIDOUT-SHARPE 2017.

²⁹ BLEGEN 1937, 465.

where a group of 40 cones was found in a heap against the east wall of the chamber, not readily associated with other finds or specific burials in the tomb.³⁰ Out of those 40, 16 were unmodified, while the rest were pierced, either at their spiral end, or on the labial side. No lead-filled examples were found in Prosymna.

At Mycenae in chamber tomb 3 of the Asprochoma/Agriosykia cemetery, a group of 52 cones was found under the stones of the drywall blocking the entrance to the chamber, 36 of them ground and pierced.³¹ They must have been placed there as a burial offering, though they cannot be associated with a particular burial. Sadly, no indication about the age or sex of the deceased in the tomb survives, since the finds were not well documented during the tomb's excavation in the late 19th century by C. Tsountas.

When comparing all data, an interesting picture emerges (Table 3):

- All the large cone shell groups include natural unmodified examples together with ground and pierced shells, in all cases modified according to the process already described.
- Lead-filled cones are actually very rare. In fact I have located only 16 examples from the Mycenaean world:³² 9 from the Mycenae Θ3 assemblage (out of 545), 2 from two chamber tombs in Mycenae,³³ 4 from the Perati cemetery (out of 338 in all)³⁴ and 1 lead filling of a now lost shell

³⁰ BLEGEN 1937, 93-98, plan 15, fig. 212. On p. 94, 38 cones are mentioned, whereas on p. 465, 40 specimens. One specimen was located at the NAM (inv. no. 6651).

³¹ ΞΕΝΑΚΗ-ΣΑΚΕΛΛΑΠΟΥ 1985, 57-58, pl. 3 (NAM inv. no. 2358). It is interesting and worth commenting that 33 of the modified shells were found stored in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens hanging on a string, as a suggestion for their use in a necklace or for safer storage. Interpreting the modified shells as beads is not plausible, as it does not adequately explain the large hole, the broken spine, the occasional lead filling or their co-existence with unmodified specimens.

³² A lead filled cone shell is also reported from Temple 2 at Kition in Cyprus, REESE 1985, 342, 347, 353, pl. A:1a, its lead (if not the object itself) probably imported from the Aegean. It was interpreted as some sort of weight, or as a counter used in game or divination, because of its association with the Temple.

³³ Both from the Kalkani cemetery: one found by C. Tsountas in tomb 86, ΣΑΚΕΛΛΑΠΟΥ 1985, 242-243, NAM inv. no. 3152, the other by A.J.B. Wace in tomb 529, WACE 1932, 224, NAM inv. no. 6554.

³⁴ ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ 1969-1970, vol. A, 197-199, pl. 60a [tomb 100: 2 lead-filled cones (Δ139) - NAM inv. no. 8727], 364-366, pl. 109b-c [tomb Σ23a: 1 lead filled cone out of 38 (Δ101) - NAM inv. no. 8249]. One more ground and pierced cone shell is filled with lead from tomb 56, not mentioned in the publication. REESE 1985, 346. NAM inv. no. 8238, personal examination.

from a chamber tomb in Thebes.³⁵ Lead-filling makes the shells much heavier, especially when compared to the hollow ones, but evidently it was not important to attain a specific weight, since at the Mycenae Θ3 assemblage the size and weight of the lead-filled examples vary considerably (Table 2).³⁶

- At Perati the modified shells were always less than the unmodified ones, seemingly not in any persistent analogy, with percentages ranging between 3% and 28% of the total. By contrast, in the Argolid, in the two burial groups from Mycenae and Prosymna and in the domestic Mycenae Θ3 group, the modified shells are more than the unmodified ones, with a very interesting fixed ratio: the percentage of modified shells ranges consistently between 60 to 70% of the total.³⁷

There is also a notable difference in the deposition of the shells: at Perati the cone shells were spread to form a layer over or below the body, while in the Argolid the shells were evidently placed in a group as a single offering – a fact which may be explained by local burial customs or individual choice.

Through the prism of the working hypothesis of a game involving groups of cone shells, we note that: a. at Perati an association of cone shell groups with children is established, and b. in the Argolid the cone shell groups display a specific analogy of two modified shells to an unmodified one, a trait which could be construed in the context of a game.

Besides the examples of cone shell groups from tombs in Attica and Argolis, there is another important assemblage of cones from a domestic context: at Lefkandi in Euboea, in the fill of Room 3 of the East House, a Mycenaean handmade *askos* with a broken handle was found, containing 25 cone shells.³⁸ It is unclear whether the find belonged with the equipment of the room, which was a kitchen, or fell there from the upper storey. The shells have not yet been published in detail, so information on

³⁵ ΚΕΡΑΜΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ 1917, 183; REESE 1985, 347; ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ 1969-1970, vol. B, 365, fn 9, thought that it was made from a cut and folded lead sheet.

³⁶ The Θ3 lead-filled cone shells range in weight from 5 to 63 g. By comparison, an empty shell about 4 cm long, weighs 10-14 g.

³⁷ It should be noted that a certain variation in numbers should be attributed to the fragility of the material and the small size of the shells which may be overlooked in excavation.

³⁸ DAUX 1966, 900-901, fig. 9; EVELY 2006, 26-28, 147, 207, pl. 21.5; REESE in EVELY 2006, CD 20 (not examined, not catalogued).

the analogy of modified to unmodified cones is lacking and cannot be used more purposely as a *comparandum* to the Θ3 assemblage. It should be noted though, that “some” ground and pierced cones are mentioned in the publication.³⁹ Furthermore, the shells were all carefully stored in a small clay vase, much like the Mycenae Θ3 shells were tightly packed in an organic container. This recalls the later Greek *phormiskos*, a pear-shaped pouch made of cloth or leather, identified in vase-painting and imitated in clay. The *phormiskos* was used for carrying around astragali for gaming and divination.⁴⁰ The Lefkandi *askos* may have had a similar function. In this respect, a find from Mycenaean Naxos becomes significant in combining a cone shell group in a clay container associated with a child burial. In chamber tomb C in the Kamini cemetery a deep bowl was found containing nine cone shells, while 15 more cones were found spread in the tomb.⁴¹

3. The context

To further illuminate the interpretation of the Room Θ3 assemblage and investigate the presence of related objects and possible gaming equipment, not initially identified, a careful re-examination of the context finds was required. The room contained a large amount of pottery sherds and several large fragments of vases, including deep bowls, jugs and small stirrup jars. The only complete vase was a large transport stirrup jar, measuring 47.5 cm in height. In the centre of the room, next to the shell and lead objects assemblage, there was an almost complete unpainted angular bowl, which could have been used in collecting small items, such as the shells, though it would not have sufficed to contain all of them.⁴²

The pottery collected in the crevice of the rock together with the enigmatic assemblage included, among others, grey Minyan and matt-painted sherds, part of a LH IIB-III A1 goblet with a spiral, a LH III A2 rhyton fragment with octopus tentacles, a fragment of a LH III A-B1 mug, a fragment of a LH III A piriform jar with scale pattern, and part of a type Phi figurine.

³⁹ REESE in EVELY 2006, CD 20. In the illustrated photograph (DAUX 1966, fig. 9 = EVELY 2006, pl. 21.5), one ground and pierced shell is visible.

⁴⁰ NEILS 1992; HATZIVASSILIOU 2001; KEFALIDOU 2004.

⁴¹ ΒΛΑΧΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ 2006, 330, 388, 398-399, 403, pls. 50, 56.

⁴² MM inv. no. 14488, H. 5.2 cm, base diam. 5 cm. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 372. Cf. the deep bowl containing nine cone shells in a chamber tomb in Naxos, ΒΛΑΧΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ 2006, 330, 388, 398-399, pl. 50: 1769; also, the *askos* from the East House at Lefkandi containing 25 cone shells, EVELY 2006, 26-28, 147, 207, pl. 21.5.

The pottery reveals that the area was inhabited much earlier than the building of the wall in this part of the citadel, a fact which is verified by other finds in the Southwest Quarter.

As noted, packed together with the shells in a rock crevice in the middle of the room, there was a group of 12 very small lead artefacts: seven pellets (Fig. 4), three conical objects and two discoid ones (Fig. 5),⁴³ all ranging from 1.1 to 2.2 cm in diameter. Intriguingly, the seven pellets increase gradually in size and weight, and they should be considered a set, though its specific use is hard to pinpoint. Objects of similar shape, same hard material and different size are usually considered a set of weights. In this

case the differences in weight are minimal and thus they would be useful only in weighing minimum quantities in a precision scale. They range from 7 to 43 grams, while the three smallest weigh practically the same.⁴⁴ Their use is interlinked with the shells', so their involvement in gaming should be considered, especially since such small pellets found in Late Minoan and Cypriot contexts have been associated with gaming.⁴⁵ The lead pellets look remarkably like a set of marbles, being in fact so small that a child's hands would be more suitable to handle them. In this respect, the remaining three conical⁴⁶ and two discoid⁴⁷ objects could be interpreted as gaming markers as well, the different shapes perhaps indicating different values.



Figs. 4-5

⁴³ MM inv. no. 12295. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 373.

⁴⁴ MM inv. no. 12295.1: diam. 1.1 cm, W. 7 g; MM inv. no. 12295.2: diam. 1.2 cm, W. 7 g; MM inv. no. 12295.3: diam. 1.3 cm, W. 8 g; MM inv. no. 12295.4: diam. 1.7 cm, W. 19 g; MM inv. no. 12295.5: diam. 1.8 cm, W. 24 g; MM inv. no. 12295.6: diam. 1.9 cm, W. 33 g; MM inv. no. 12295.7: diam. 2 cm, W. 43 g.

⁴⁵ HILLBOM 2005, 65-68. See also CRIST 2016, 218, for Cypriot clay balls.

⁴⁶ MM inv. no. 12295.8: H. 1.3 cm, diam. 2.1 cm, W. 23 g; MM inv. no. 12295.9: H. 2 cm, diam. 2.1 cm, W. 41 g; MM inv. no. 12295.10: H. 1.85 cm, diam. 2.2 cm, W. 41 g.

⁴⁷ MM inv. no. 12295.11: H. 0.9 cm, diam. 1.4 cm, W. 6 g; MM inv. no. 12295.12: H. 1.2 cm, diam. 1.9 cm, W. 21 g.

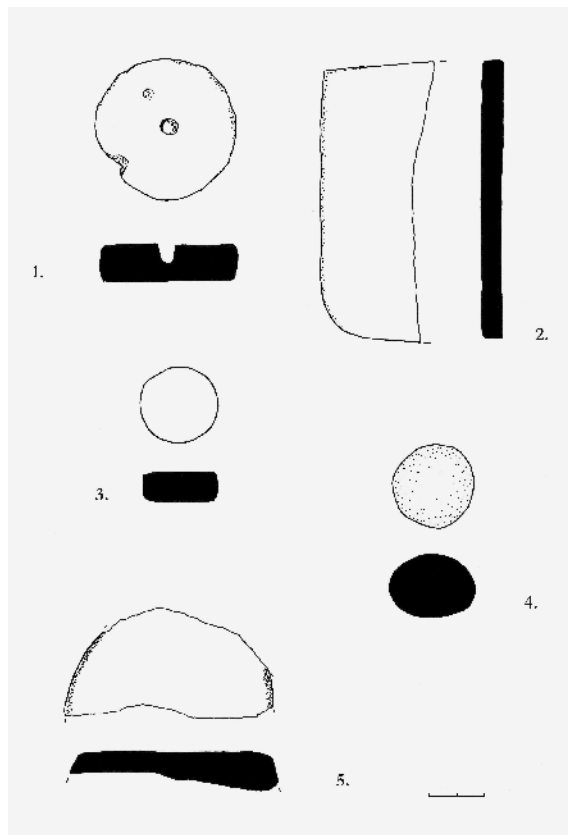


Fig. 6

All these lead objects could have provided the lead for filling some shells and they were thus interpreted by their excavator, G.E. Mylonas, in his excavation notebook. Together combined they equal 273 grams of lead. Taking into account that about 35 grams are needed to fill a 4 cm long *Conus* shell, this quantity would suffice to fill about 7 such shells. However, since the seven pellets (at least) are so painstakingly constructed, it seems unlikely they were destined for melting.

In the room deposit a large lead disc was also collected, with a diameter of 5 cm, bearing a deep hole on one side and a shallow circle near its periphery, weighing 214 grams (Fig. 6:1).⁴⁸ This could have been a balance weight or a small ingot for providing the lead to fill the shells, given also that part of the disc on one side was already missing.

The destruction deposit filling

Room Θ3 also included: 31 fragments of coloured frescoes,⁴⁹ as well as a small mass of blue colour pigment⁵⁰ and two masses of white colour,⁵¹ 2 glass paste beads,⁵² a very thin ivory disk inlay with a hole near its periphery,⁵³ one flint flake⁵⁴ and three obsidian flakes,⁵⁵ few traces of a bronze object⁵⁶ and 37 fragments of the usual Mycenaean clay human and animal

⁴⁸ MM inv. no. 14242.1: H. 1.2 cm, diam. 5-5.1 cm, hole diam. 0.65 cm, hole depth 0.7 cm, W. 214 g. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 371, pl. 86:18.

⁴⁹ MM inv. no. 12296, 12300, 12305, 12318, 12319. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 351, 371.

⁵⁰ MM inv. no. 12302. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 371.

⁵¹ MM inv. no. 12309. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 371.

⁵² MM inv. no. 12306, 12312. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 351, 371.

⁵³ MM inv. no. 12310. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 361.

⁵⁴ ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 351.

⁵⁵ MM inv. no. 14402, 14242. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 361, 371.

⁵⁶ MM inv. no. 12308. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 371.

figurine types.⁵⁷ A trachyte spouted mortar lay on the floor of the room and it might have provided the rough surface needed to grind the shells.⁵⁸

Most importantly the Room Θ3 destruction deposit also included an interesting array of 33 objects made of colourful stones in a variety of shapes. These objects have not been associated with the shell and lead objects assemblage in the publication of Building Θ, but I believe their presence in the context of Room Θ3 should be considered in more detail, under the possibility of their use in gaming activities.

A most notable find was the fragment of a large, flat and thin, rectangular whetstone (Fig. 6:2), made of grey sandstone,⁵⁹ which may well have been the one used to grind the shells on, to create a flat surface and hole. In relation to the large and heavy mortar just mentioned, this is a more practical, easily portable object.

There was also a group of small stone discoid objects which could have been used as markers. Most remarkable among them is a small disc looking very much like a checker piece (Fig. 6:3), made of black diorite with white specks, well-polished on all surfaces.⁶⁰ A second object, a small compressed spherical pebble of greenish andesite (Fig. 6:4), could also have

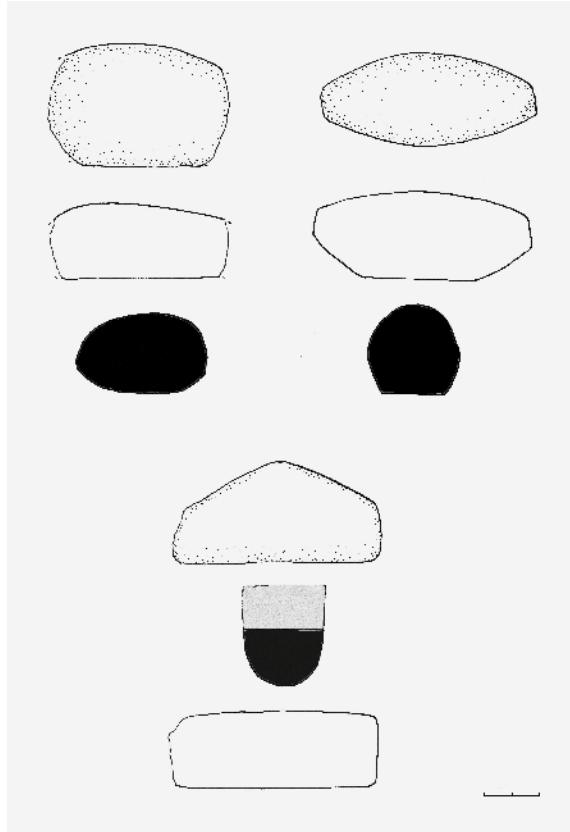


Fig. 7

⁵⁷ ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 350-351, 360-361, 369-370, pls. 79b:10, 81b:6, 83:18, 84b:10, 85b:4, 85b:5, 87:8, 87:9. Large numbers of figurine fragments are common in the Mycenae citadel deposits.

⁵⁸ Not located in the Mycenae Museum for study. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 372. A “tubular bone object, burnished outside, with finished edges, 3,4 cm long” described in ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 371, is a misidentification for a horizontal tubular handle of a gray burnished vase (MM inv. no. 14479).

⁵⁹ MM inv. no. 14243: L. 10.1 cm, thickness 0.8 cm, pres. width 4.1 cm. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 351.

⁶⁰ MM inv. no. 12315: H. 1.1 cm, diam. 2.85 cm, W. 19 g. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 361. HILLBOM 2005, 68-69 for Minoan parallels.

been a checker piece.⁶¹ There were also: the fragment of a large black steatite disc (Fig. 6:5),⁶² a discoid pebble of pinkish stone⁶³ and a flat pebble of green stone with black spots, well-polished on the surface, but for the narrow sides (Fig. 7:1).⁶⁴ A pair of spherical pebbles, of similar size, forming slightly smooth, almost flat sides, could have been used as weights, polishers or rolling counters (with flat surfaces useful for landing). One is made of green andesite,⁶⁵ the other of a brown stone with whitish specks.⁶⁶

The deposit included also three more remarkable stone finds. One is a peculiarly shaped object (Fig. 7:3) made of grey veined marble, flattened, triangular, with one rounded edge, which could stand on either of its flat sides, or on one of its narrow converging surfaces, but not on the widest lateral side.⁶⁷ It stands out because of its unusual shape, the effort and precision of its construction, but it has no obvious function or parallel, therefore its use as an elaborate gaming piece is at least a possibility to be considered.

The second is a sphendonoid object with a flat base (Fig. 7:2), made of black diorite with white specks.⁶⁸ It belongs to a type of stone balance weights well-known in Eastern Mediterranean contexts,⁶⁹ though there is no reason to preclude other uses. In fact, there is at least one instance where such objects were associated with gaming equipment. At the Katsambas cemetery near Knossos, five sphendonoid objects made of stones of different colours were found in tomb H in a Late Minoan context which included conical gaming pieces and an astragalus die marked on its four sides with one, two, three and four holes.⁷⁰

The most remarkable stone object from the Θ3 deposit is a unique paleontological find, the oldest object to have ever been found at Mycenae. It is a large fossil astragalus (talus) belonging to a rhinoceros species, dating as far

⁶¹ MM inv. no. 14487: H. 2.35 cm, diam. 3.1 cm. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΑΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 371. HILLBOM 2005, 63-64, on pebbles as gaming counters.

⁶² MM inv. no. 14242.2: Diam. 7 cm, pres. H. 1.2 cm, pres. width 3.7 cm. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΑΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 371.

⁶³ MM inv. no. 14242.3: Diam. 5 cm, H. 2 cm, W. 77 g. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΑΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 371.

⁶⁴ MM inv. no. 14249.2: L. 6.4 cm, width 4.5 cm, H. 2.7 cm, W. 150 g. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΑΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 354.

⁶⁵ MM inv. no. 14479.1: Diam. 5.2-5.7 cm, W. 266 g. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΑΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 371.

⁶⁶ MM inv. no. 14479.2: Diam. 5.6-5.9 cm, W. 295 g. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΑΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 371.

⁶⁷ MM inv. no. 14220: L. 7.3 cm, H. 3.7 cm, thickness 3 cm, W. 142 g. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΑΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 361.

⁶⁸ MM inv. no. 14249.1: L. 7.8 cm., H. 3.2 cm, thickness 3.4 cm, W. 118 g. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΑΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 354.

⁶⁹ PETRUSO 1992, 3; ΙΑΚΩΒΙΑΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 354, fn 690.

⁷⁰ ΑΛΕΞΙΟΥ 1967, 39-40, 57-58, pl. 28a. At the Perati cemetery a small sphendonoid object made of hematite was found in a tomb together with two lead-filled cone shells. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΑΗΣ 1969-1970, vol. A, 197-199 (Λ208), pl. 60a.

back as the Pliocene or the Pleistocene (Fig. 8).⁷¹ Its original provenance is unknown, as well as how and why it was collected and ended up in a Late Helladic context at Mycenae. It is not easy to assess the full meaning such an object might have had for the Mycenaean, or whether they realized its immense antiquity, but we may surmise that they identified the shape of an astragalus of a large mammal – they may even have attributed it to a supernatural being.

In respect to the hypothesis of a gaming context, this large, very heavy astragalus finds an interesting parallel in Late Bronze Age Ugarit, where Claude F.-A. Schaeffer collected a bovine astragalus filled with lead, weighing 280 grams. His workmen in the excavation informed him that bovine astragali were still used for a game in the villages of Syria.⁷² The heavy astragalus was rolled with the purpose of knocking over the maximum number of smaller lighter bones. Should we imagine its involvement in a gaming activity, the Θ3 fossil astragalus might have had a similar use in knocking over the shells, or even functioning as a large die, as in the late-Babylonian rules for the game of 20 squares⁷³



Fig. 8

⁷¹ MM inv. no. 14242.4; 10 cm x 8.2 x 5.9 cm., W. 501 g. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΑΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 371, pl. 86:19. The fossil was overlooked in the publication of the Southwest Quarter and was first identified by Jacqueline S. Meier, who contributes more on the object in an appendix to this paper. A detailed study of the object by J.S. Meier and the author is underway.

⁷² The game was called “mourasasse” or “sakka” in Syrian, and the bovine astragalus was called a “ka’b”, SCHAEFFER 1962, 103-105, fig. 64; GILMOUR 1997, 167-168. In South America the gauchos play a tossing game with bovine astragali (tabas) LOPES NETO 1912, 167-175. Two lead-filled bovine astragali are also reported from Cyprus: one from a tomb at Kouklia (Palaeapaphos)-Teratsoudhia, Karageorghis 1990, 45:92, pl. XXXVII: B.92; REESE 1990, 144, 149: pl. A:4, the other, weighing 64.84 g, from the floor of a sacred courtyard area at Kition, REESE 1985, 382, pl. B:5. Note also CARÈ 2013 who calls for caution in attributing preconceived values in different types of astragali without adequate evidence.

⁷³ FINKEL 2007, 21.

The fact that it weighs 501 grams, i.e., exactly 1 *mina*, which is the large unit of weight in Late Bronze Age Aegean, means that it might also be interpreted as a rare zoomorphic balance weight.⁷⁴

Scattered about the room deposit there were also 22 small *conuli*⁷⁵ of olive green, dark purple and black steatite, a common find in the Mycenae citadel. But for one biconical, the rest belong to the more common conical and discoid varieties, their height ranging from 0.7 to 1.4 cm. An interesting feature of this group was that these *conuli* were all shorter than the average *conulus* which measures 1.5 cm, therefore, size-wise they are comparable to the small lead objects found together with the shells. The *Conuli* have been variously interpreted as spindle-whorls, buttons, beads or decorative dress elements hanging from the hem, sleeve or bands around the waist.⁷⁶ They should probably be viewed as multi-functional objects, their use depending on needs and contexts, since they are present in domestic, ritual and burial contexts with no evident pattern of use. The Room Θ3 context with its gaming connotations could offer an insight on the use of *conuli* in gaming. They could easily be placed on a board game surface as gaming markers, moved around (even with a small stick in their vertical holes), and are easy to carry.⁷⁷ D.S. Reese has suggested that *conuli* may appear in large numbers in burial contexts alternately to cone shells⁷⁸ and Naya Polychronakou-Sgouritsa rightly points out that their presence as grave offerings in child burials is better explained as gaming equipment, rather than any other suggested use.⁷⁹

4. Evaluation of possible interpretations

Most of the small finds from lead and stone in the Θ3 deposit would habitually be interpreted as balance weights, and this possibility has indeed been considered. Karl M. Petruso's catalogue of balance weights from all Aegean sites includes an extremely wide range of values, all referable to units of ca. 10.60 and 500 grams (1 *mina*) which were used in the Aegean.⁸⁰ Indeed, one may refer all the weight values of the lead and

⁷⁴ Very few examples are known from the Aegean, resembling an oxhead or a reclining ox, the type being of Near Eastern inspiration. PETRUSO 1992, 3-4.

⁷⁵ MM inv. no. 12299, 12311, 14257. ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 351, 361, 371.

⁷⁶ ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ 1977, 114-115, 118-119; RAHMSTORF 2008, 134-138; ΑΝΔΡΙΚΟΥ 2019, 167, 178.

⁷⁷ *Conuli* are also ideal as toy spinning tops.

⁷⁸ REESE 1983, 356.

⁷⁹ ΠΟΥΛΧΡΟΝΑΚΟΥ-ΣΓΟΥΡΙΤΣΑ 1987, 23-24.

⁸⁰ PETRUSO 1992, 78-82; PAKKANEN 2011.

stone objects in Θ3 as multiples or fractions of these units, given also that a fluctuating proximity of 5%-7% to any unit is allowed, mainly because of some loss of material over time. Recent metrological studies proved that the proportionate association to a unit does not suffice as a sole criterion to identify balance weights. Lorenz Rahmstorf has convincingly demonstrated that practically any stone or lead object may refer to one of the Late Bronze Age metric systems current in the Eastern Mediterranean, often to more than one, and advised caution in identification, suggesting a set of criteria.⁸¹ The point to be stressed here is that the mentality of habitually attributing most Mycenaean stone and lead objects to weighing systems impedes the identification of gaming implements.

As already noted, at least some of the stone objects may have been used in one or more gaming activities in association with the shells. They have various shapes, generally small size, most forming a flat surface that would facilitate standing on a board, while others are more rounded (so they could have been rolled or placed in a board with depressions), and they are made of different colourful materials – an important parameter in identifying gaming implements.⁸²

The cone shell group in Room Θ3 cannot be associated with balance weighing, if anything because of the shells' fragile character, unless they themselves constituted at some point a commodity that required weighing. One should consider the shells' use in a metrological context as pieces in a counting system. This does not actually differ significantly from the hypothesis of their use in gaming, in that the different categories would suggest different values. The association of cone shells with children would make sense either way, as game or counting implements, but the fragile material and the large number of the Θ3 cone shells seems more justified in gaming. Most importantly the use of shells as counting devices has no contemporary parallels in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Though there was no evidence for the practice of cultic ritual in Room Θ3 or in any of the other rooms of Building Θ, one should not exclude the practice of divination, that is the attempt to foresee the future by reading

⁸¹ RAHMSTORF 2006, 9-12. See also MICHALIDOU 2006, 248-252.

⁸² The statistician F.N. DAVID 1962, 6, perceptively remarks: "The conjunction of the coloured pebbles and astragali on the prehistoric sites and of the coloured counters and astragali in the early board games is suggestive (and tantalising), but there will probably never be enough evidence to link the two".

logic into fortuitous signs and believing in divine intervention in human affairs.⁸³ Divination and games were closely interconnected throughout antiquity, it is thus difficult to discern one from the other activity in the archaeological record.⁸⁴ Both involved gaming implements which generate luck, like cubic or polyhedral dice, binary lots and astragali.⁸⁵ In cleromancy these implements offer simple yes-or-no answers, or a more complex message through numbers, images or patterns formed. The shells and small lead objects of Θ3 could have been thrown on the ground to form chance patterns. The fossil astragalus, undoubtedly appreciated by the Mycenaeans as a unique object, perhaps attributed to a supernatural being, may have been associated with the occult and thus may have played a key role in any divination, magical or mystical practice.

Focusing on the hypothesis of the existence of gaming implements in the Room Θ3 deposit, one may note the following: The three categories of shells (unmodified, ground-and-pierced and lead-filled) may have been markers of different function or value in a game, with the small lead objects also constituting a variant category. Some of the stone objects in the room deposit might also have been involved in gaming activities, like the whetstone for grinding the shells, the small discoid objects as markers, and the fossil astragalus as a heavy rolling piece or die.

5. Gaming parallels

The assemblage of the shells and small lead objects could have been used in games known during the Late Bronze Age in the Eastern Mediterranean. They could be gaming implements either for games without a specific board (like some games with astragali) or for those requiring a specific game frame on stable, portable or temporary surfaces of various materials: wood, stone, ivory, faience, etc., or even on the ground.

The large number of the Θ3 shell assemblage is comparable to the groups of numerous astragali collected and associated with gaming or ritual depositions from the Early Bronze Age onwards in Greece, Cyprus, Anatolia and the Near East. These groups recall the modification treatment of the Θ3 shells, including worked (ground, polished, perforated, drilled)

⁸³ VON FRANZ 1980, 38-50; AHERN 1982.

⁸⁴ MURRAY 1952, 233-235; BEERDEN 2013, 37-40.

⁸⁵ DAVID 1962, 13-19; GRAF 2005. In Late Bronze Age Kition cone shells and a lead-filled cattle astragalus have been associated with divination practices, REESE 1985, 388-389.

specimens and specimens filled with lead, iron or bronze, as well as imitations in other materials (bronze, glass, faience, stone, etc).⁸⁶ While there is insufficient evidence for the Bronze Age, in ancient Greece astragali were used in gaming in several ways, and were still popular throughout the centuries,⁸⁷ enjoyed and played both by children and adults.⁸⁸ S. Iakovidis suggested that the Mycenaeans must have developed a game with heavier cone shells used for scattering lighter ones, similar to a modern game with astragali. This should not sound strange, since Julius Pollux in the 2nd century AD mentions in his *Onomasticon* that besides astragali, people used to play the game with broad beans, walnuts and almonds. The contextual data in Θ3 indicate that some of the stone objects in the room deposit might have been used for scattering the shells. If indeed such a game with shells existed in Mycenaean times, we may assume that the shells were later replaced with astragali, which were more durable and easier to collect.

The most popular board games in the Late Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean were race games like the Egyptian *senet* and *mehen*, the game of 20 Squares (of which the most famous example is the Royal Game of Ur) and the game of 58 Holes, known also as ‘Hound and Jackals’. All these games had a broad dissemination and a lot of variations.⁸⁹ They all required a game board with specific places and a small set of counters and pieces.

In Late Bronze Age Crete, Cyprus and the Near East numerous gaming stones or slabs with depressions have been found, at least some of which interpreted as boards for *senet* and *mehen*.⁹⁰ They have irregular shapes, cavities in rows, and were sometimes used on both sides. The cavities are shallow and would therefore require small and round gaming pieces, like pellets, seeds, nuts, pebbles and shells.⁹¹ The Θ3 group of cones and small

⁸⁶ REESE 1985, 387-388; GILMOUR 1997; POMADÈRE 2018, 11.

⁸⁷ Classical and Byzantine literature sources comment negatively on the excessive occupation of adults with these games and morally condemn gambling. The Church Fathers spoke fiercely against dice games, there were penalties and prohibitions, but in practice not even priests, nor beggars or royalty could avoid succumbing to the guilty pleasure of dice games. Niketas Choniates, a 12th c. Byzantine historian, reprimands Alexios, son of Isaac Komnenos, for playing dice all day with his friends. ΚΟΥΚΟΥΛΕΣ 1948, 167-172, 182, 215-217.

⁸⁸ See Poll., *Onom.*, 9.99-103, and the commented edition of COSTANZA 2019; DAVID 1962, 2-12; SCHÄDLER 1996.

⁸⁹ ROTHÖHLER 1999; SEBBANE 2001; FINKEL 2007; FINKEL 2008; DE VOOGT *et alii* 2013; CRIST *et alii* 2016a.

⁹⁰ SWINY 1980; WHITTAKER 2002; HILLBOM 2003; CUCUZZA 2010; CRIST 2016.

⁹¹ CRIST 2016, 215-219.

lead objects would have been suitable for such a game, however there is no evidence in the Mycenaean world for such portable or fixed stone slabs. The only exception to this rule is found at Dimini in Thessaly, where a large limestone slab, measuring 160 by 75 cm, was found on the floor next to a side entrance to Megaron B.⁹² It had two rows of shallow cavities placed at a right angle to each other. Close to it there were objects which the excavator interpreted as offerings in a cult ritual: a sealstone, a unique kylix sherd with a Linear B inscription, 15 fragments of clay figurines and fragments of bronze objects and vases. Though stone slabs with cavities are practically missing in Mycenaean sites, we should consider the possibility that wooden boards, which are lighter and easily portable, were preferred, like in Egypt, or that the game might have been played directly on the ground.⁹³

An interesting parallel worth mentioning exists in the game of Mancala where the use of shells is very common. This is a game of expertise and calculation, extremely popular in Africa, the Near and the Middle East, but not attested before late Antiquity.⁹⁴ It is usually played in wooden boards with deep cup-like depressions or on the ground, and requires a significant number of pieces, without differentiated markers.

6. *Why so serious?* Gaming and the Mycenaeans

The ambiguity in safely identifying board game material is a wider problem in Mycenaean archaeological records.⁹⁵ The reasons for the lack of evidence on Mycenaean board gaming are plenty: the complete disintegration of perishable organic materials, objects in secondary use which are hard to identify as gaming pieces (e.g., fragments of figurines or sherds), objects to which a different function is habitually appointed (e.g. animal figurines or stone *conuli*), the disturbance of Mycenaean settlement layers and the lack of relevant textual and iconographic sources.⁹⁶ There is also an inherent difficulty in distinguishing between ritual and gaming behaviour,⁹⁷ with archaeologists tending to identify the former over the latter.

⁹² ΑΔΡΥΜΗ-ΣΙΣΜΑΝΗ 2001, 92, fig. 16; ΑΔΡΥΜΗ-ΣΙΣΜΑΝΗ 2004, 42, 44, fig. 29.

⁹³ Cf. the case of the grid floor in a building from Thebes, mentioned below, ΑΡΑΒΑΝΤΙΝΟΣ – ΦΑΙΠΠΑΣ 2012, 930, figs. 2, 3.1.

⁹⁴ DE VOOGT 1996; SCHÄDLER 1998; DE VOOGT 1999; VOJT 2012.

⁹⁵ POMADÈRE 2018. Observed for Minoan contexts as well, HILLBOM 2005.

⁹⁶ See two notable exceptions in Minoan art with people playing board games on a fresco and a seal, HILLBOM 2005, 86-87, figs. 21, 23.

⁹⁷ RENFREW 2018, 14-15; KYRIAKIDIS 2018; MALAFOURIS 2018, 309-315.

Indeed, until now, there has been no specialised study on the subject of Mycenaean board gaming. Only sporadic and tentative identifications of board gaming implements appear in relevant scholarship. The most frequently quoted example of a board game in a Mycenaean context still belongs with a late 19th century discovery of an object believed to be of Minoan origin. In the excavation of Tomb IV in Grave Circle A at Mycenae in 1876, H. Schliemann collected several pieces of faience and rock crystal plaques which could be combined as inlays of a large wooden game board. This board was interpreted as an imported luxury, as many of the Grave Circle A finds are, a gift for the Mycenaean elite,⁹⁸ probably originating in Crete or Egypt. It has been compared to the splendid game board later found at Knossos by Sir Arthur Evans,⁹⁹ made of rock crystal, ivory, silver, gold and glass paste.¹⁰⁰ The Knossos game board is one of the largest of its kind surviving from antiquity, reaching almost 1 meter long and including at least four large conical ivory pieces.

No definite evidence exists for any other similar portable game boards from the Mycenaean palatial or post-palatial times. Ivory inlays for wooden furniture and small boxes are relatively common, but they are rarely associated with the decoration of gaming boards or gaming boxes, despite the existence of similar contemporary finds in Cyprus, Egypt and the Near East.¹⁰¹ Some of the ivory plaques coming to light in Mycenaean sites, with elaborate pictorial representations could have decorated wooden board games, while some of the ivory plaques which do not have traces of inlaying and bear engraved signs may be gaming pieces or even binary lots.¹⁰²

As already noted, there are no stones with depressions, common in the Eastern Mediterranean, but for the single example from Dimini.

A recent rescue excavation in Thebes brought to light an extremely interesting and rare find: part of a large, engraved grid was uncovered on the floor of a palace building in the Kadmeia citadel. It was made up of square unbaked bricks with pebbles stuck in the corners. Among other

⁹⁸ EVANS 1921, 482-485, figs. 346-348; KARO 1930-1933, 115-116, 243-244, nos. 555, 556, 568, 574, taf. CLI-CLIII; FOSTER 1979, 141-143, fig. 92; HILLBOM 2004, 58-59.

⁹⁹ EVANS 1921, 472-482, figs. 337-340, 342, 344, pl. V; BRUMBAUGH 1975; HILLBOM 2004.

¹⁰⁰ HILLBOM 2004, 61-68.

¹⁰¹ CRIST *et alii* 2016a, figs. 4.2, 4.5, 5.2.

¹⁰² HILLBOM 2005, 77-81, 85-86.

finds on the floor, there was a clay cuboid object with images painted on its sides, which recalls other similar ones from Mycenae, Thebes, Perati and Glyka Nera.¹⁰³ The excavators assume the existence of a large board, set on the floor, and interpret the cuboids as gaming pieces (pawns). Polyhedral objects in antiquity have functioned as dice and polyhedral Mycenaean examples certainly deserve an analytical study.¹⁰⁴

Gaming counters, the simplest pieces which do not have any special properties or values in a game, are notoriously hard to identify. Small objects are habitually interpreted as useful implements in various industries or weighing or are left without an interpretation, when they are not easily attributed to any productive activity. There are only a few instances where some so-called ‘enigmatic’ objects tend to be considered as board game counters, pieces, tiles or dice – as if usefulness should always come before pleasure. This mentality is bound to change with the study of contemporary evidence from neighbouring areas, since games tend to ‘travel’.¹⁰⁵ After all, throughout the ages, board gaming is the commonest way for merchants and soldiers to pass their time pleasantly.

Through most of the scholarship produced in almost 150 years of Mycenaean archaeology, a picture emerges where the Mycenaeans do not engage in playing, gaming, gambling or any such leisurely pastimes. Researchers have dealt with the practice of sports and athletic contests, suggesting, under the influence of the Homeric narrative, that Mycenaeans engaged in chariot racing, foot racing, boxing and bull-leaping.¹⁰⁶ Hunting, a seemingly omnipresent activity in Mycenaean culture, may also be regarded as a leisure activity – and there are people who even consider hunting a sport. Mycenaean iconography suggests that the aristocrats organized hunting expeditions with a formal character involving several assistants, dogs and chariots – much like fox hunting was organized in 15th century England. But hunting was much more than simply entertaining: it was a meat-procuring method, a rite of passage, a field of displaying bravery and a symbolic action of man prevailing over nature.

¹⁰³ ΑΡΑΒΑΝΤΙΝΟΣ – ΦΑΙΠΠΑΣ 2012, 930, 933-935, figs. 2, 3.1, 9, 10.

¹⁰⁴ DAVID 1962, 18; HILLBOM 2005, 82-85; PLATZ-HORSTER 2017.

¹⁰⁵ BIELINSKI – TARACHA 1992; CRIST *et alii* 2016b.

¹⁰⁶ RYSTEDT 1986; RYSTEDT 1988; RENFREW 1988; MOURATIDIS 1989, 55-63. These activities are always depicted in an official secular or religious ritual setting, but there is little actual evidence that they were practiced in real life, RUTTER 2014, 43-48.

All in all, the Mycenaeans appear rather solemn and official in every aspect of their social life. This is a perception which stands in complete contrast to basic human behavioural patterns, which demonstrate the necessity and need to play. This could not have been an ‘all work and no play’ civilization and gaming must have had an important role in the life of children and adults alike – if anything else for educational reasons. Hopefully further systematic research will illuminate more thoroughly this neglected subject.

Appendix: A description of the stone object by Jacqueline S. Meier

In 2019, further examination was made of the unique stone object from the Θ3 deposit House Θ in the Southwest Quarter of the Mycenae citadel. This was previously identified from photos as a large stone model of a bovine (*Bos taurus*) or possibly bear (*Ursus sp.*) astragalus. However, closer inspection of the object in person revealed that it was an astragalus (talus) specimen of fossilized bone. The mineralized astragalus specimen is from the left side of the body of an individual in the rhinoceros taxonomic family. In this appendix, I provide a basic description of the find.

Observations of the morphology of the specimen support a general taxonomic identification of either *Dicerorhinus* or *Stephanorhinus sp.* The trochleae are divided by a deep depression and are not much wider than the head portion of the specimen. On the anterior side, the medial trochlea has a nearly continuous boundary with the neck and head. The orientation of the axis of the trochlea is slightly oblique and more so towards the lateral side. Although worn, the articular facets for the cuboid and navicular bones appear similar in anterior-posterior length. The dorsal edge of the proximal calcaneal facet is also somewhat worn.

Overall, the fossil from House Θ is of considerable size, spanning a maximum height of 81.2 mm and a maximum breadth of 83.0 mm. Although it represents a large animal, the astragalus fossil is smaller than the average size maximum height for other fossilized talus specimens from the local and wider region that were identified as *Coelodonta sp.*,¹⁰⁷ or as *Dihoplus megarhinus*.¹⁰⁸ Based on the available information, the fossil from Mycenae most likely represents a *Dicerorhinus* or *Stephanorhinus sp.* individual.

¹⁰⁷ TSOUKALA – GUÉRIN 2016.

¹⁰⁸ PANDOLFI 2013.

Given the fact that this fossil was found removed from the paleontological context and some of the surface features are worn down, the identification of the type of prehistoric rhinoceros species remains a tentative one.

It is estimated to be from a *Dicerorhinus hemitoechus* or *Stephanorhinus etruscus* individual based on the size and morphology of the specimen. Other fossilized remains of astragali of these taxa have been found in the Aegean that are comparable in size and shape.¹⁰⁹ Still, the rhinoceros astragalus specimen may have originated from a more distant location than the context at Mycenae where it was ultimately found. In all, the rhinoceros astragalus represents an interesting example of fossil collecting in the past at Mycenae.

¹⁰⁹ TSOUKALA – GUÉRIN 2016.

Ø3 CONE SHELLS

| TOTAL | UNMODIFIED | MODIFIED | |
|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| 545 100% | 192 35.2% | 353 64.8% | |
| | | <i>Ground and pierced</i> | <i>Lead-filled</i> |
| | | 344 | 9 |
| 100% | 35.2% | 63.1% | 1.7% |

Table 1.

Ø3 Cone Shells filled with lead

| | Length (in cm) | Weight (in grams) | Description comments |
|----|----------------|-------------------|---|
| 1. | 4.4 | 63 | Broken in half of apex, sealed with clay |
| 2. | 3.4 | 53 | Shell broken and lost |
| 3. | 4.1 | 36 | |
| 4. | 3.85 | 34 | Holes on apex and body, sealed with clay, not completely full of lead |
| 5. | 3.6 | 42 | Lead mass overflowing labial aperture |
| 6. | 3.4 | 30 | Sealed with clay |
| 7. | 3 | 22 | |
| 8. | 2.4 | 5 | |
| 9. | 1.8 | 5 | |

Table 2.

CONE SHELL GROUPS FROM MYCENAEAN CHAMBER TOMBS

| NAM | Site | Tomb | Burial | Cone shells TOTAL | Unmodified | Ground and pierced | Lead-filled |
|------|----------|-----------|--------------|----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| 8797 | Perati | Tomb 131 | child | 160 | 148 92.5% | 12 7.5% | - |
| 8722 | Perati | Tomb 54 | child | 60 | 58 96.7% | 2 3.3% | - |
| 8249 | Perati | Tomb Σ23α | child | 38 | 32 84.21% | 5 13.15% | 1 2.63% |
| 8238 | Perati | Tomb 56 | child | 25 | 17 68% | 7 28% | 1 4% |
| 8222 | Perati | Tomb 36 | child? | 13 | 11 84.6% | 2 15.4% | - |
| 8834 | Perati | Tomb 133 | unidentified | 11 | 8 72.72% | 3 27.3% | - |
| 8780 | Perati | Tomb 119 | child | 11 | 11 100% | - | - |
| 2358 | Mycenae | Tomb 3 | unidentified | 52 | 16 30.8% | 36 69.2% | - |
| 6651 | Prosymna | Tomb XXVI | unidentified | 40 | 16 40% | 24 60% | - |

CONE SHELL ASSEMBLAGE FROM ROOM Θ3, MYCENAE

| NAM | Site | Building | Room | Cone shells TOTAL | Unmodified | Ground and Pierced | Lead-filled |
|-------|--------------------|----------|------|----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| 14267 | Mycenae citadel | Θ | Θ3 | 545 | 192 35.2% | 344 63.1% | 9 1.7% |

Table 3.

Illustrations

Fig. 1. Plan from the S of the basement level of Rooms Θ1 and Θ3 in House Θ, at the Southwest Quarter of the Mycenae citadel. After ΙΑΚΩΒΙΔΗΣ *et alii* 2013, 303, plan 7.

Fig. 2. Group of *Conus ventricosus mediterraneus* shells from Room Θ3.

Fig. 3. Lead-filled cone shells from Room Θ3.

Fig. 4. Lead pellets from Room Θ3.

Fig. 5. Lead conical and discoid objects from Room Θ3.

Fig. 6. Lead disc and stone objects from the deposit in Room Θ3.

Fig. 7. Stone objects from the deposit in Room Θ3.

Fig. 8. Fossil astragalus from the deposit in Room Θ3.

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Games and oracular practices around the hearth: the “table of offerings” from the so-called Temple 4 at Kition-*Kathari* (Cyprus)¹

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Abstract. In the sanctuary of Kition-*Kathari* (Cyprus), a building with benches, identified as a temple (“Temple 4”), is characterized in its centre by a hearth pit next to a trapezoidal stone construction, constituting “Altar E”. The platform’s surface comprises a series of little cup-holes. Once labelled “table of offerings”, it has recently been interpreted as a gaming table. Besides clay gaming stones, this area has yielded knucklebones as well as several deposits of incised scapulae linked with divination practices. This Cypriot context gives us the opportunity to explore and also to put in light the influences and interactions between different regions of the Eastern Mediterranean at the turn of the 1st millennium BC.

Gaming table, gaming stones, hearth, altar, merchant-mariners’ context

Περίληψη. Στο ιερό της Καθαρής Κιτίου (Κύπρος) ένα κτίριο με θρανία που ταυτίστηκε με ναό (Ναός 4), χαρακτηρίζεται στο κέντρο του από μια εστία πλησίον λίθινης, τραπεζοειδούς κατασκευής που αποτελεί τον «Βωμό E», η άνω επιφάνεια

¹ Since this paper was given for publication, *Around the Hearth*, an edited volume dedicated to symbolic and ritual practices in association with fireplaces, has been published: LAMAZE – BASTIDE 2021.

του οποίου περιλαμβάνει μία σειρά μικρών κοιλοτήτων. Αρχικά θεωρήθηκε ως «τράπεζα προσφορών», ωστόσο πρόσφατα ερμηνεύτηκε ως τράπεζα παιχνιδιού. Εκτός από πήλινους πεσσούς, στον χώρο αυτό εντοπίστηκαν αστράγαλοι, καθώς και αρκετές αποθέσεις, ωμοπλατών με εγχαράξεις, που συνδέονται με μαντικές πρακτικές. Αυτό το κυπριακό σύνολο μας προσφέρει την ευκαιρία να διερευνήσουμε και να δια φωτίσουμε τις επιρροές και αλληλεπιδράσεις μεταξύ διαφορετικών περιοχών της Ανατολικής Μεσογείου στην στροφή της 1ης χιλιετίας π.Χ.

Τράπεζα παιχνιδιού, πεσσοί, εστία, βωμός, πλαίσιο θαλασσινών εμπορών

Riassunto. Nel santuario di Kition-Kathari (Cipro), un edificio con banchina laterale identificato come tempio (“Tempio 4”) ospita nella sua parte centrale un focolare affiancato da una piattaforma trapezoidale (“Altare E”), la cui superficie è caratterizzata dalla presenza di una serie di piccole cavità. Originariamente interpretato come “tavola di offerte”, l’apprestamento è stato recentemente identificato come tavola da gioco. Da quest’area del santuario provengono astragali e piccole sfere in terracotta probabilmente ad uso ludico, ma anche depositi di *scapulae* con incisioni che potrebbero, invece, essere attribuite a pratiche divinatorie. L’analisi del contesto cipriota permette di mettere in luce fenomeni di influenza e interazione culturale che interessano diverse regioni del Mediterraneo orientale intorno al volgere del primo millennio a.C.

Tavola da gioco, pietre con piccole cavità (*kernoi*), focolare, altare, commerci marini

Introduction

Generally speaking, in human societies, similarities between play and ritual are very strong. Consequently, scholars try to detect and define aspects of play and ritual, notably in the archaeological records.² This paper addresses the relation, or space syntax, between fixed hearths and gaming stones through the Cypriot context of Temple 4 at Kition-*Kathari*, an ashlar building presenting an unparalleled fixed gaming table, close to a fireplace, in the middle of a main hall. As a corollary, it assesses the relation between play and rites, specifically by analysing together gaming stones and artefacts in context, such as incised scapulae.

1. General presentation of the site

The remains of ancient Kition, known through ancient literary references,³ lie under the modern-day town of Larnaca, on the South-East coast of Cyprus.⁴ The settlement of Kition was established on a plateau; it was fortified from the Late Bronze Age until the Classical period, and was a prominent port for trade from the 13th century until the Ptolemaic conquest of the island in 312 BC. Indeed, its well protected bay offered ideal conditions for a harbour, especially from the Late Bronze Age when the South coast of Cyprus became the centre of trade with the rest of the Mediterranean, favoured by its proximity to the Syro-Palestinian coast and to Egypt. Besides economic factors,⁵ the fact that the coastline of Larnaca is the first one when sailing westwards from the Levant explains the choice of Kition by the Phoenicians from the 9th century BC onwards. The island of Cyprus has been a place of interconnection between the Near East and the Mediterranean throughout its history. The site of Kition-*Kathari*, corresponding to Area II, also called *sacred area*, was uncovered from 1959 by the Department of Antiquities of the Republic of Cyprus.⁶

² These notions are well summarized in the introduction “Play as the precursor of ritual in early human societies”, of the recent volume on *Ritual, Play and Belief, in Evolution and Early Human Societies* by RENFREW *et alii* 2017. See also the introduction of DASEN –VESPA 2021.

³ The first mention in texts dates back to the 13th c. BC at Ugarit.

⁴ For a general presentation of the site of Kition, cf. SMITH 2009, 6-10.

⁵ Some economic factors explain the flourishing of Kition, especially the presence of neighbouring copper mines and the proximity with a salt lake.

⁶ For the history of the research at Kition, cf. KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 1-4.

1.1 The archaeological context

Temples 4 and 5 are situated in the eastern sector of Area II and are separated by a street and a large open area (Courtyard A). Temple 4 is built directly alongside the city wall, and oriented East-West. It was first built in the 12th century BC, corresponding to Floor IIIA.⁷ After destruction and short abandonment at the end of the Bronze Age, Temple 4 was partly rebuilt for Floor I at the turn of the 1st millennium BC (Fig. 1).⁸ For the first time since its construction, a stone table, or “altar”, is associated with the use of Temple 4. Floor I corresponds to the Cypro-Geometric I. In absolute chronology, this period is dated between 1050 and 1000 BC.⁹ Yet, recently, a revised chronology proposed to date Floor I between 1000 and 850 BC.¹⁰ To choose between chronologies is beyond the scope of this paper; we will limit ourselves to mentioning that the latter has received some criticisms.¹¹ In the same way, if we use the term “temple” by commodity for referring to these architectural complex, because they are commonly labelled this way by scholars, one should keep in mind that this terminology is quite problematic. Generally speaking, in Kition-*Kathari*, Area II, buildings appear as multifunctional, as we will see in particular with the contexts of temples 4 and 5; although we cannot exclude that ritual practices took place inside these buildings, their denomination as temples is largely due to interpretative bias based on Classical Greek temples.¹²

1.2 The architecture

Temple 4 is an ashlar building (9 x 14 m) with a large central hall (Room 38) to the West and three other smaller rooms to the East (38A, 38B, 38C). The main hall is consistent with a hearth room:¹³ it is equipped with a hearth, approximatively in the middle of the room, close to a

⁷ LAMAZE 2014, 249-250, with previous bibliography.

⁸ KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 148-151. See also KARAGEORGHIS 1976, 92-93; LAMAZE 2014, 250.

⁹ Traditional chronology published by V. Karageorghis in KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 267, 279; KARAGEORGHIS 2005, 2.

¹⁰ Revised chronology proposed by SMITH 2009, xviii.

¹¹ Cf. FOURRIER 2011.

¹² Cf. WEBB 1999, 8-9, 76, 83-84; KNAPP 2008, 181-182, 228, 240.

¹³ About Late Bronze Age Cypriot hearth rooms, in terms of architectural influences at the cross-road of the Aegean and the Levant, cf. LAMAZE 2014, 247-253.

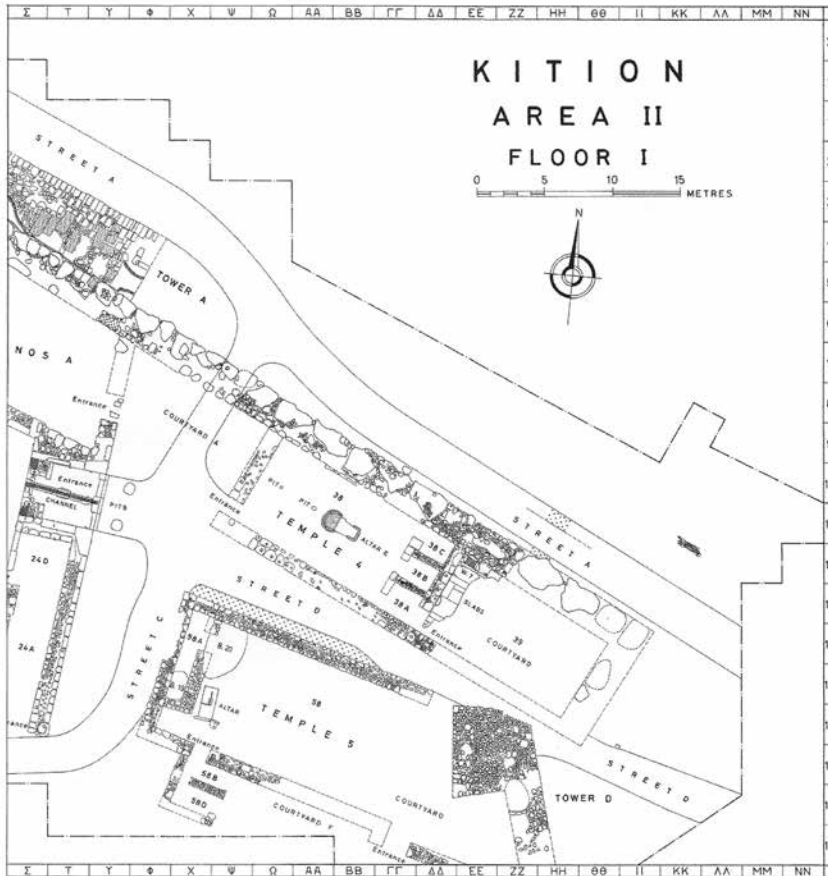


Fig. 1

stone-built table to the East (Fig. 2)¹⁴. The hearth is enclosed within a three-quarter circle border of mudbrick and clay (W. 15 cm and H. 12 cm) the internal dimensions of the hearth are 1.15 m x 95 cm, with a depth of 35 cm; it was filled with layers of ash and mudbrick and clay representing several renewals of its floor and produced burnt and unburnt animal bones, as well as White Painted I sherds.¹⁵ The stone table – once labelled

¹⁴ KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 149-151. According to SMITH 2009, 156, this structure might have been built in response to dramatic events (earthquake and flood) which had destroyed this port area.

¹⁵ According to the excavator, the hearth – by contrast with the altar-table which constitutes a new feature for the building – is not the first hearth of this building; Floor I covered small “hearth-altars” of earlier floors, cf. KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 149.

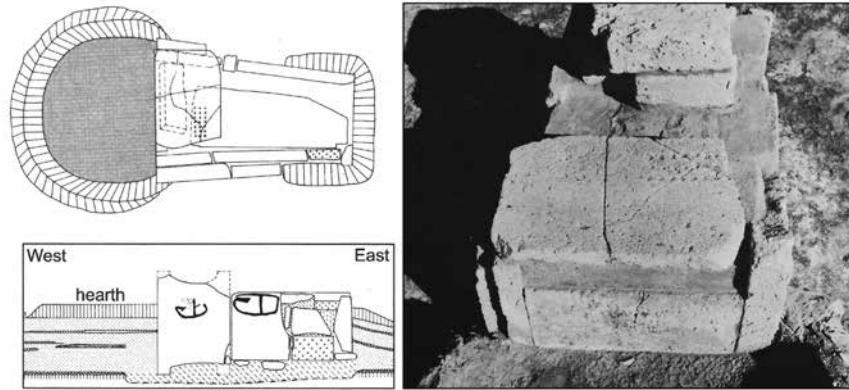


Fig. 2

“table of offerings”¹⁶ – has a trapezoidal shape, narrowing slightly to the East; it measures 1.60 m (L.), for 70 cm (W.) to 1.15 m at its western end, and its height is between 40 to 50 cm. More than half of the table lies below the level of Floor I, as foundations. The table is enclosed on four sides by a single or double row of vertically placed slabs; the southern slabs are decorated with graffiti of ships. The large slab, which faces the hearth, was covered with plaster to protect it from the fire. A reused ashlar block composed the core of the table, while the top of the table was covered with slabs, one of which, comprising three rows of seven circular depressions on the surface, was *in situ* and may be a reused gaming stone. The floor around the stone table was burnt and sloped down on all sides. Most of the slabs are damaged and seem clearly to have been reused from an earlier structure – perhaps the original altar of the temple for Floor IIIA-II.¹⁷ Besides, the global characteristics of the room are not unproblematic. There used to be benches in ashlar masonry both along the North and the South wall during Floor IIIA, but their existence during Floor I remains unsure, though the upper shelf of the northern bench could still have been utilized. The main hall is presumed roofed, at least in the western part, where two wooden support posts were found.¹⁸ To the East

¹⁶ E.g. KARAGEORGHIS 1976, 92; for the giving up of this terminology, cf. FOURRIER 2003, 89, in particular note 4. Acknowledgments are due to Sabine Fourrier for her advice relating to the documentation of these Cypriot gaming stones.

¹⁷ Cf. KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 151; see also KARAGEORGHIS 1976, 92-93.

¹⁸ KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 149. Generally speaking, the room seems to have been totally (or at least partially) roofed during all periods. In a precedent phase, during Floor IIIA, the main hall was roofed by a T-shaped alignment of five pillars, while the western part of the room was characterized by a well and a circular hearth. However, that the building was roofed during Floor

of Room 38, a courtyard (39) was characterized by paving slabs and a well (7), as in the previous phases, but probably no longer in use.¹⁹

1.3 The finds

The main hall produced one fragmentary clay shovel, blackened by fire and most probably connected with the use of the hearth, while another specimen, with the same characteristics, was found in Room 38A. This last room also produced two White Painted I bowls and one dish, a large amphora, as well as a terracotta palm of a human hand. A spindle-whorl and glass beads are also mentioned, along with a bronze scrap. Overall, Temple 4 was characterized by (Proto-)White painted I Plain White and ‘Canaanite’ sherds.²⁰ In the final publication, some of these artefacts have received a religious meaning: thus, the three shovels would have been “used during sacrifices on the hearth-altar”, while the terracotta palm is assumed to belong to the figure of a goddess with upraised arms.²¹

1.4 Gaming stones related to temple 4

During the phase of use of Floor I, along with the *in situ* slab with depressions aforementioned,²² it is possible to associate two other gaming stones²³ which once formed part of the top of the table, or alternatively were in use in another context in Temple 4.²⁴ Moreover, a fourth stone with circular depressions was found North of the Temple, outside the city wall.²⁵ In any cases, all these gaming stones may derive from an earlier use of the building.

I has been challenged by J. Smith, according to whom: “Temple 4 does not appear to have had a roof when the hearth stood inside it and flames, or more likely smoke” (SMITH 2009, 82). Yet, besides which her argument is contradicted by the fact that sandstone pillar bases were found in the next level where there was still a hearth, in the Eastern Mediterranean architecture, in no way the existence of a fireplace for a flaming fire does prevent the existence of a proper roof (cf. e.g. LAMAZE 2011).

¹⁹ The first building was equipped with two wells, cf. KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 129, 151.

²⁰ KARAGEORGHIS 1985, 207-208; KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 243.

²¹ KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 243.

²² KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 150; KARAGEORGHIS 1985, 242.

²³ For the nomenclature “gaming stones” and the related problems of interpretation see discussion *infra* “Gaming stones in Cyprus: general considerations”.

²⁴ KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 150; KARAGEORGHIS 1985, 242.

²⁵ 98 depressions arranged in a spiral, cf. KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 151; KARAGEORGHIS 1985, 242.

2. Gaming stones and hearths in the Eastern Mediterranean:

An overview

2.1 Cyprus

To our knowledge, on the island of Cyprus, there is no similar context that associates fireplace, table-altar and gaming stone(s), which is quite intriguing.²⁶ However, in a wider spectrum, that is in the corpus of Eastern Mediterranean central hearth buildings,²⁷ some contexts are indeed concerned with the association between fireplace and gaming stone. Moreover, in Kition-*Kathari*, during the phase that precedes the edification of “Altar E”, several elements (figurines, *naïskoi*, script, etc.) have been identified as of Aegean influence, more specifically Cretan one.²⁸ Regarding the appearance of the games in Cyprus, it has sometimes been assumed that traders from Crete might have been involved in the introduction of the Levantine forms of *Senet* and *Mehen*.²⁹ Besides, Niklas Hillbom has convincingly demonstrated the existence of a 3x10-design in LBA Crete.³⁰ Anyway, even though it is vain trying to determine which population (Levantine people, Cretans, etc.) has played a leading role in the transmission of these games, the relation between hearth room and gaming stone indeed might well point to the Aegean. Therefore, some Aegean contexts deserve to be mentioned here as they can offer a comparative point of view to the central arrangement of Kition-*Kathari*.

2.2 Greek mainland

Some recent discoveries on the Greek mainland deserve mention. On the hill of Ayios Konstantinos, on the East coast of Methana (Peloponnese), a *kernos* was found in association with a building (Building Z, also called “*megaron*” by Eleni Konsolaki-Iannopoulou, the excavator) which has yielded some evidence for possible ritual activities, and shares some architectural features with the Mycenaean *megaron*.³¹ The main room was equipped with a central hearth containing ashes and a substantial quantity of food waste, as well as fragmentary cooking pots (with traces of

²⁶ At least, SMITH 2009, 156 and note 183, suggests that a gaming stone might have been associated with Temple 3, but the context is quite unsure.

²⁷ Cf. LAMAZE 2012.

²⁸ KARAGEORGHIS 1976, 91; KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 279.

²⁹ SWINY 1980, 72; HILLBOM 2003, 41.

³⁰ HILLBOM 2003, 42-45.

³¹ Cf. KONSOLAKI-IANNOPOULOU 2004, with previous bibliography.



Fig. 3

burning), along with two stone-built benches. A roughly worked block of andesite, characterized by five shallow circular depressions cut into its top surface, was found in the area of the porch (Fig. 3).³² According to E. Konsolaki-Iannopoulou, even if a purely religious function may not be proposed for the “*megaron*”, it must still have been closely associated with a LH IIIA-B shrine in its vicinity – the large open space around the free-standing building offered enough place for gatherings.³³

At Dimini (Thessaly), in the LH IIIC Mycenaean palatial complex, a large slab with depressions or “*altar*” (1.60 x 0.75 m) was found near one entrance of the so-called “*Megaron B*”.³⁴ This entrance gave access to storage rooms and rooms for the preparation of foods; some of them most probably used as banquet halls. On the opposite side of the building, in the middle of room 1 – giving access to three little rooms (one of which was

³² The exact location where it would have been originally placed is not certain, but its findspot in the debris of the destruction layer indicates some position in front of building Z; KONSOLAKI-IANNOPOULOU 2004, 74.

³³ KONSOLAKI-IANNOPOULOU 2004, 75: “the impressive structure is very likely to have housed religious officials and to have functioned as an administrative centre [...] the involvement of a ruler in that sanctuary is not to be excluded”.

³⁴ The building was destroyed at the end of the 13th c. BC. Cf. ADRIMI-SISMANI 2006, with anterior bibliography. See also CUCUZZA 2010, 141-142 which mentions this context in his discussion about the Minoan ‘*pierres à cupules*’.

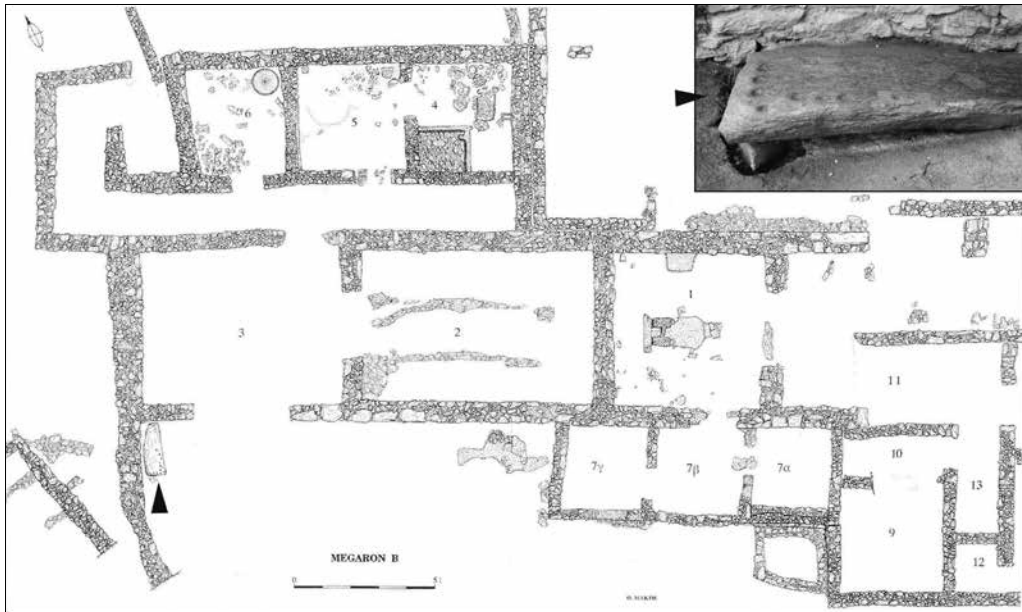


Fig. 4

equipped with a bench) – was found an altar which produced burnt bones. On the limestone block, the holes, despite being irregularly positioned, follow two edges of the slab (Fig. 4). Around this installation, apart from two fragmentary craters and at least two *rytha*, a lot of small objects were found: nine human and six animal figurines, a figurine seated on a throne, a stone seal, a fragment of a kylix with an engraved Linear B inscription, pictorial-style sherds, miniature clay vessel and element of furniture, many bronze pins and leaves, etc. Actually, as pointed out by Nicola Cucuzza, the identification of this slab with depressions partly depends on the way we interpret the figurines and the small finds as gaming pieces or votive offerings, keeping in mind also that both uses may not be exclusive.³⁵ Anyway, it is interesting to note that in these two Mycenaean contexts the stones with depressions always appear at the entrances of monumental buildings, which seem to have both a political and religious function (and/or connected with a religious building), but above all which are commensal spaces. Moreover, it should be pointed out that the situation of these specific stones, near the entrance to a large open area, is very similar to that of the Cretan gaming stones, and not only the Late Bronze Age examples.

³⁵ CUCUZZA 2010, 142.

2.3 Crete

Minoan gaming stones have been the subject of many studies.³⁶ Gaming stones have been found in approximately 20 sites in central and eastern Crete, most of which date to the Protopalatial period (ca. 1900-1700 BC). For what concerns the Late Bronze Age, a recent study just addresses the relation between hearths and the hollowed slabs, called *kernoi*, during the Neopalatial period (1700/1675-1470/1460 BC). The author, Quentin Letesson, explores the role that fixed hearths and *kernoi* might have played in the built environment and shows how, through time, both fixtures acquired particular symbolic and functional meanings.³⁷ Anyway, concerning the types of these hollowed slabs, the “linear” type, with holes arranged in parallel rows, seems to be more recent than the “circular” type. At the end of the Bronze and EIA appears a circular type variant, with the division of the holes in two different halves.³⁸ For what concerns our chronology, three coherent LBA/EIA sites from Eastern Crete, close to each other, testify to the occurrence of fixed “*kernoi*” arranged near the entrance of central hearth buildings.

The most ancient context comes from a LM IIIC settlement at Vronda-Kavousi. There, on the summit of the hill, a massive terrace wall was constitutive of the foundation of a large house with forecourt (Building A-B), next to a storeroom (Building B), and diversely interpreted as the residence of a local ruler or as a communal building (prototype of an *andreion*). Set into the North side of the courtyard, just outside Room B6, at its South-West corner, is a flat paving stone (28 x 35 cm) with a ring of 24 shallow circular depressions forming a rough oval (Fig. 5).³⁹ While this “*kernos*” was most likely in use contemporaneously with Building A-B in the courtyard, it has been suggested that it was a Protopalatial (MM II or LM I) antique, reused in this later LM IIIC context.⁴⁰

³⁶ The bibliography concerning Minoan gaming stones is plethoric, cf. HILLBOM 2003 with anterior references.

³⁷ Hearths and *kernoi* have indeed existed since quite early in Minoan culture. They are documented from the Neolithic onwards for the former, and since the Prepalatial period (3100/3000-1925/1900 BC) for the latter. So far, both features have been extensively studied and considerable insights offered on their role within Minoan society; LETESSON 2015.

³⁸ HILLBOM 2003; and also, FOURRIER 2004; in the French literature, *kernoi* are also called “pierres à cupules”.

³⁹ DAY *et alii* 1986, 365, pl. 77c; HAGGIS *et alii* 2011, 28, with references; for a recent description of this archaeological context, cf. GAIGNEROT-DRIESEN 2016, 384-385 (though, she curiously omits to mention the existence of this *kernos*).

⁴⁰ DAY 2009, 49.

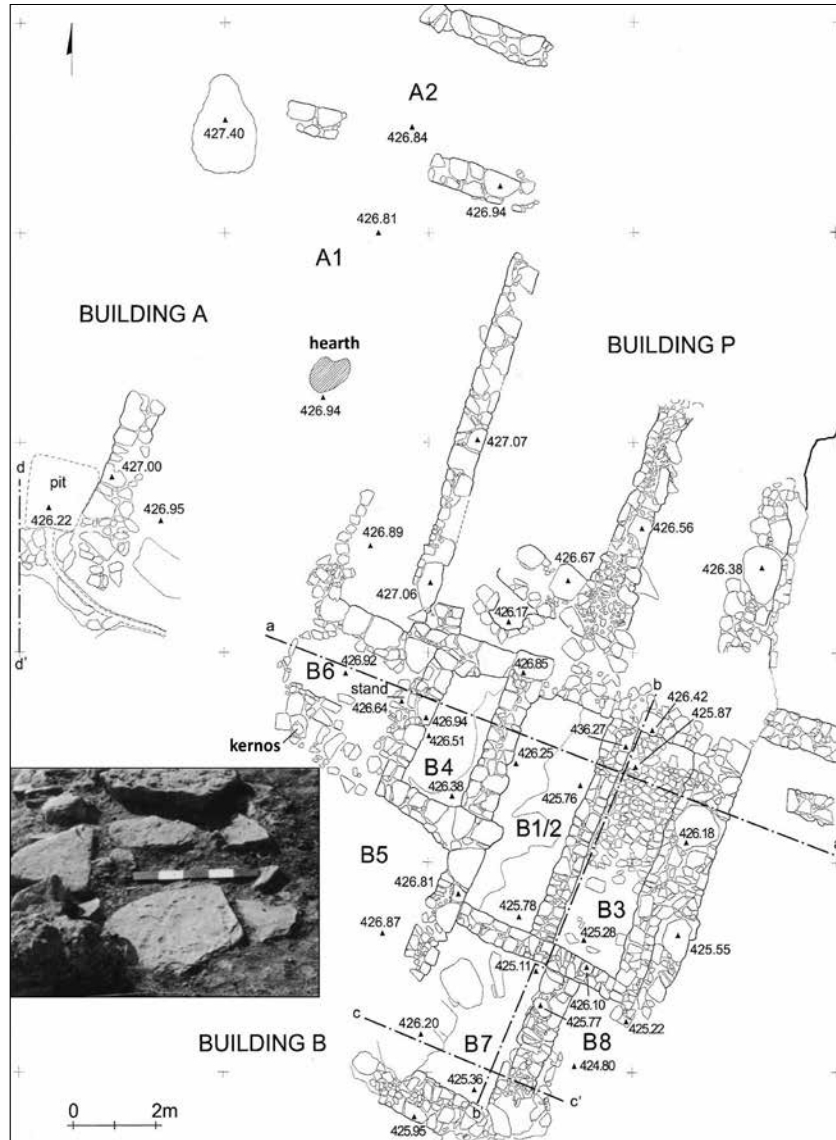


Fig. 5

Further up, on the Citadel of Kastro-Kavousi, an ancient discovery from the beginning of the 20th century had shed light on a quite similar hollowed stone, identified as a slab for a game. It is important to mention that it comes from the only securely identified external public space of the settlement, that is in a courtyard, next to the exclusive entrance to Room 27 (Building H), the largest room excavated on the

Kastro.⁴¹ The building and courtyard complex of LG-EO date (ca. 745-700 BC) occupy the most central and visible location of the site, where routes of communication end. Two column or pillar bases were found in the middle of the room, roughly on axis with the North and South doorways, but since the floor surface was extremely eroded no hearth has been preserved, although such centrally located feature is expected here. The gaming stone (11.5 cm thick) forms a rough square with a diagonal of about 50 cm. On this stone a circle is marked, and within its circumference are ten round holes; the board is divided into halves by a straight line with five holes on each side (Fig. 6).⁴² From the same courtyard, the discovery of a clay “counter”, which exactly fits the holes in the stone (diam. 3.3 cm), has to be mentioned because it constitutes an extremely rare occurrence.⁴³ Harriet Boyd, the excavator, associated this circular board with the game which is played by the Ithacans when Athena visits Telemachus, because of the presence of the dividing line, reminding of the *iera grammê* or *peossos*.⁴⁴ Besides, whereas the exceptional character of the building has to be underlined, nothing seems to indicate it was a cult building.⁴⁵ According to Coulson, “[t]he large size and exceptional architecture of Building H and its spacious main room and bench, the direct and peculiar lateral access to it from the central court of the Kastro, the presence of the *kernos* stone, and the location of the complex at the highest and most obtrusive spot all point to a special function for the structure, perhaps public, political, religious, or a combination of these”.⁴⁶

In the Archaic city of Azoria-*Kavousi*, the recent excavations have shed light on three “slabs with depressions” (two of them *in situ*) inside

⁴¹ COULSON *et alii* 1997, 339-340; see also the recent synthesis of GAIGNEROT-DRIESEN 2016, 416-417.

⁴² This gaming stone is traditionally dated to the LM IIIB period, despite the first suggestion of a Geometric date, cf. HILLBOM 2003, 58, 67, no. 38. However, as D.C. Haggis suggests (HAGGIS *et alii* 2011, 27, n. 56), no positive evidence supports the fact that the stone has to be earlier than Late Geometric. First of all, more recent excavation has shown that the activity on the peak was not earlier than the 7th c.; moreover, following a suggestion of D.C. Haggis, we agree on the fact that this type of *kernos* is not attested in Bronze Age contexts; consequently, it might be an EIA specimen used until the Orientalizing period; see HAGGIS *et alii* 2011, 28, n. 57.

⁴³ BOYD 1901, 141, *contra* CHAPOUTHIER 1928, 303-304, and note 1, who suggested that this supposedly “clay counter” was actually most probably a mere clay stopper, and rejected the identification of the block as gaming table.

⁴⁴ Hom., *Od.*, 1.107; Herod. 1.94. See BOYD 1901, 141; COULSON *et alii* 1997, 340.

⁴⁵ GAIGNEROT-DRIESEN 2016, 417.

⁴⁶ COULSON *et alii* 1997, 340.

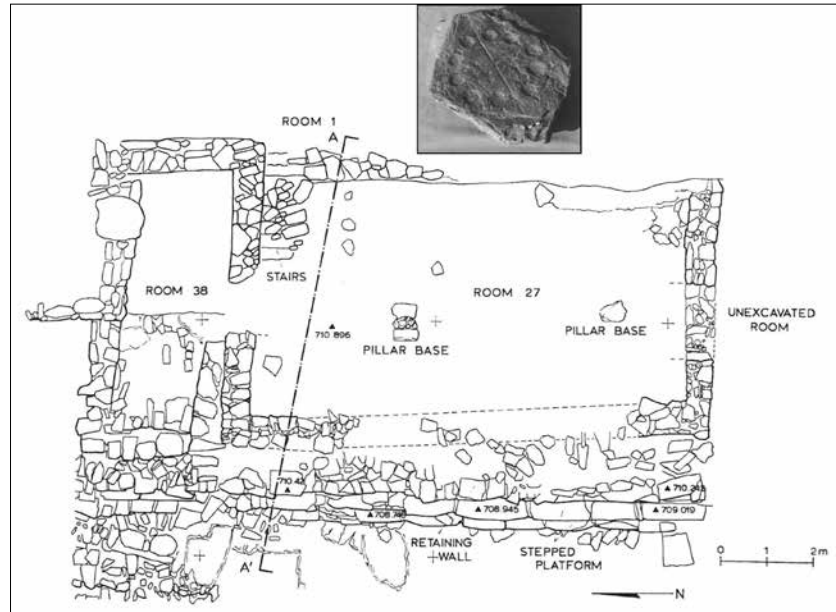


Fig. 6

a “Monumental Civic Building”, characterized by internal double-steps along three walls (*terminus ante quem*: 5th century BC).⁴⁷ The two hollowed slabs, still *in situ*, are situated on the eastern upper step, one in the middle of it and the other at its South-East end (Fig. 7). As suggested by the scholars, the topographical situation of these *kernois* appears reminiscent of the Bronze Age arrangements known in the Minoan palaces (e.g. Phaistos and Knossos).⁴⁸ Moreover, it has to be stressed that this Monumental Civic Building, which shows evidence for communal feasting and assembly, was directly in connection, through a door, with a two-room Hearth Shrine gathering both a hearth and an altar. The whole of it clearly served for the preparation and the consumption of ritual meals, including sacrificial practices.⁴⁹ This led Donald C. Haggis to the conclusion that:

The Monumental Civic Building seems to combine certain basic functions of LM IIIC and EIA rulers’ houses and hearth temples, but on a much expanded scale, integrating larger numbers of people and perhaps inviting

⁴⁷ For the building, cf. HAGGIS *et alii* 2011, 16-28.

⁴⁸ For the slabs with depressions or *kernois*, cf. HAGGIS *et alii* 2011, 19-21, 25, 27-28, fig. 10, fig. 15.1-3; CUCUZZA 2010, 142. For the *kernois* from the Minoan palaces, cf. FERRARI – CUCUZZA 2004.

⁴⁹ HAGGIS *et alii* 2011, 29-38.

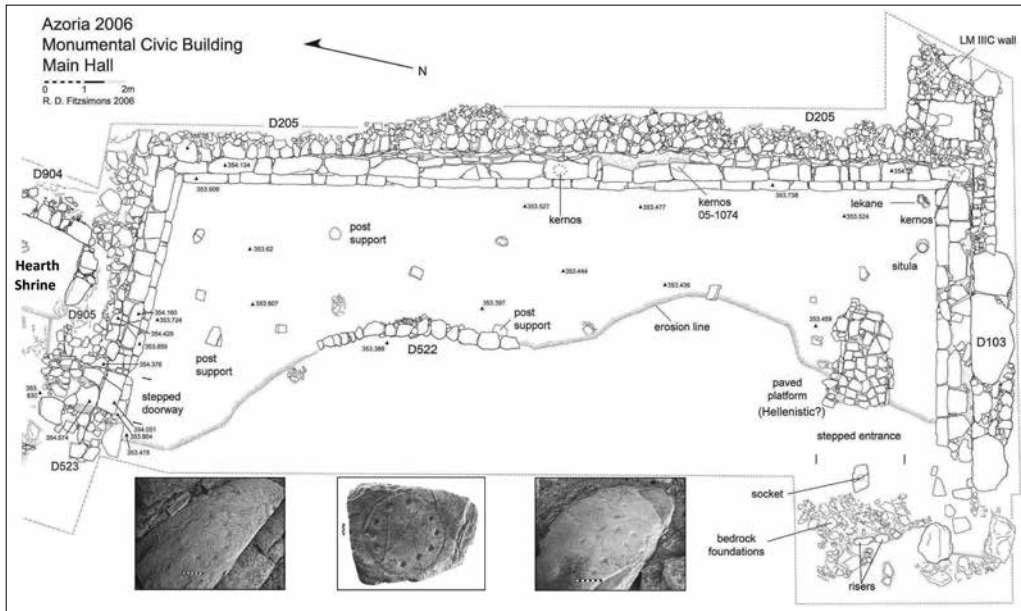


Fig. 7

wider public participation. [...] If so, then in the Archaic context, public feasting [and playing] would have been intentionally dissociated from a specific elite household and opened to a wider community, perhaps on occasion to all citizens.⁵⁰

3. Contextualization: The material environment of “Temple 4”

Before trying to analyse this structure with gaming stones and examine their typology, it is important to take into consideration the material environment of Temple 4, Floor I.

3.1 Maritime context – Anchors

In Antiquity, pierced stones served as anchors. In Kition-*Kathari*, Area II, over one hundred were diversely used in the construction of the buildings.⁵¹ Besides, a quantity of stones of exceptional size was discovered in the ‘temples’.⁵² Comparable anchor groups were also recognized in (tower-) temples located in Ugarit (Temple of Baal) and Byblos (Tower-Temple or

⁵⁰ HAGGIS *et alii* 2011, 28.

⁵¹ As pillar bases, threshold blocks, corner stones, wall foundations, in benches. Cf. WEBB 1999, 184 and 186, fig. 71.

⁵² Cf. the specific study by FROST 1985. About the Kition anchors see also WEBB 1999, 184-187.

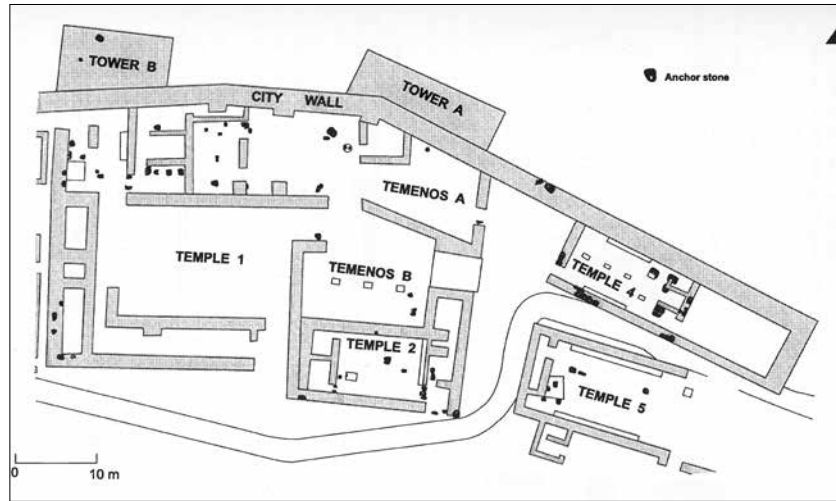


Fig. 8

proto-lighthouse, and also the Obelisks Temple).⁵³ Remarkably, the site of Kition has produced the largest anchors yet recorded.⁵⁴ Their study has shown that all the anchors of Area II are *ex-votos*,⁵⁵ mostly made in workshops within the temple precincts; none of the temple anchors could have once served at sea, as they are either new or unfinished.⁵⁶ Also, some of them show traces of burning,⁵⁷ others bear incised lines, signs, or cupules. Thus, it has been suggested that they were used to hold libations or small offerings such as seeds; the signs of burning might result from the combustion of these offerings. Moreover, seven of these large anchors come from Temple 4 which contained more anchors than any other buildings (Fig. 8), a fact that it is tempting to associate with the ship graffiti on the inner altar of the main hall.⁵⁸

⁵³ FRANCIS-ALLOUCHE – GRIMAL 2019, 113 (with earlier references).

⁵⁴ In height, they range from just over 1 to 1.62 m; the latter has an estimated weight of 1350 kg, while the smallest weighs around 300 kg (FROST 1985, 291). According to the scholar, there is a corollary between the size of an anchor and the size of the ship that carries it. The largest anchor from Kition comes from Temple 4, weighing approximately a ton, and would sink an 8-meter fishing boat (FROST 1985, 283).

⁵⁵ The overwhelming majority of the offerings at Kition seems to have been motivated by precaution rather than gratitude (at the exception of few ones carried on board by ships). FROST 1985, 290. On the topic see also GAMBIN 2014, in particular p. 10.

⁵⁶ *Contra* WEBB 1999, 184, who suggests that sets of anchors from the wall foundations of Temple 4 might represent the complement of anchors carried on a ship.

⁵⁷ Among them, two specimens (5137, 5132) come from the walls of Temple 4; they are situated on either side of the temple's eastern entrance (FROST 1985, 288-289).

⁵⁸ FROST 1985, 291.

3.2 Representation of ships

In both Temple 1 and Temple 4, graffiti of ships were executed by different hands and incised on blocks, an element which shows evidence of the presence of ancient mariners. In Temple 1, more than 19 ships were carved throughout the history of use of the building, from at least the 12th century BC to the 6th century BC, which is just before the development of a harbour with ship docks at Kition-*Bamboula*.⁵⁹ These depictions of sailing ships have been interpreted as representations of both mercantile (round ship) and martial (long ship) boats, though the last category is significantly less important.⁶⁰ The monumental buildings of Kition-*Kathari* were visible to those arriving at its port. Thus, according to Joanna Smith, “[i]n form and scale, [the graffiti] preserve the essential outline of ships that could have been seen from a distance as they were anchored in or sailed into the harbour”.⁶¹ Some scholars convincingly interpreted these ‘ships-graffiti’ as *ex-votos*, corresponding to some sort of cultic offering realized by mariners for safe sailing (boarding or landing, or both).⁶² Their symbolism evokes *ex-voto* paintings in medieval churches or ship graffiti inside and outside these monuments.⁶³

Turning back to the context of Temple 4, the slabs constituting the southern face of the platform were decorated with incised graffiti of two, possibly three, ships, belonging to the known ‘round ship’ family (Fig. 2). They were only visible above the level of Floor I, “giving the impression of the ships floating on the sea”.⁶⁴ Indeed, even if the slabs were in secondary use – the platform having been built after an earthquake –, the ships were engraved during their use as supports for the table-structure. At any rate, they were only visible during the phase of use of Floor I, which equates to a fairly short lifespan of about 50 years.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Cf. CAUBET *et alii* 2015.

⁶⁰ BASCH – ARTZY 1985, 322-336, figs. 1-6, 8; ARTZY 1987; ARTZY 1988; ARTZY 2003, 239, 244-245. About boats in ancient Cyprus (1100-500 BC) and in particular for the distinction between battle ships and mercantile vessels see BASCH 1987, 249-264.

⁶¹ SMITH 2009, 81.

⁶² ARTZY 2003, 244.

⁶³ GAMBIN 2014, 10, 11. Some local medieval examples of ship graffiti are really convincing: DEMESTICHA 2017.

⁶⁴ KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 151.

⁶⁵ BASCH – ARTZY 1985, 323-324; SMITH 2009, 81-82, fig. III.2.

4. Oracular practices?

4.1 The incised scapulae

At Kition-*Kathari*, all extant 11 specimens of incised scapulae collected in Area II were of continuous use on the area over some 750 years, from the end of the Bronze Age down to the Classical period, that is from the LC IIIA through the Geometric, Archaic and Classical periods.⁶⁶ Specimens of incised scapulae are recorded from Temples 4 and 5. In the paved courtyard, situated immediately to the E of Temple 4, three fragments (3691A-C), belonging to three different bovine scapulae, were discovered in the built stone well (7), in association with Myc. IIIC:1 sherds material.⁶⁷ In Temple 5, Floor I, another scapula, with 21 surviving incisions (3816), comes from Room 58, the main hall of the building, characterized by several floor-hearths.⁶⁸

The Kition scapulae indicate a clear continuity of ritual practice associated with Area II. Actually, there are reasons to believe that they were used in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages in *scapulomancy* practices, a divination technique, also called *omoplastoscopy*.⁶⁹ According to Jennifer Webb, “[t]he use of the scapula as the organ of divination suggests that the shoulder of the sacrificial animal was accorded a special importance in Cypriote religious practice”.⁷⁰ The details of the procedure though remain obscure. Based on anthropology, it is possible to suggest that during this ritual, the

⁶⁶ WEBB 1985; WEBB 1999, 249-250; see also SNODGRASS 1994, 171-172 and SMITH 2009, 159-160.

⁶⁷ WEBB 1985, 317.

⁶⁸ The incised area of the scapula was polished. Cf. WEBB 1985, 318. During the use phase of Floor 3 (ca. 800-725 BC), another specimen (4673) comes from the *bothroi* 23+13, situated South of Temple 4, cf. WEBB 1985, 318.

⁶⁹ The practice of divination in this zone is not surprising because we also have evidence for such practices using internal organs of animals at Kition, such as a votive inscribed bronze of a liver or kidney (middle of the 13th c. BC), found in Area II, more precisely in the holy of the holies of Temple 2; KARAGEORGHIS – MASSON 1971. Concerning *omoplastoskopeia*, byzantine sources like Michael Psellus, writing in the 11th c. AD, described this method which consists in inspecting the natural features of sheep scapulae. It was widespread amongst the Greeks and certainly practiced in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Still in the early 19th c., sheep scapulae were used by the klephts (warlike mountain-folk who lived in the countryside when Greece was a part of the Ottoman Empire) to predict the outcome of their next engagement with the enemy and even today, in certain parts of Greece, sheep scapulae are used to predict the immediate future of the family (read from the scapula of the Easter lamb). Cf. WEBB 1985, in particular 326-327, with references; WEBB 1999, 249. The oracular use of notched scapulae seems supported also by an inscribed specimen from a Cypriot Archaic context, where one can read the word “e-ro-to” (“asking”), cf. SMITH 2009, 160, with references, and GYSEMBERGH – FURLEY 2015 (I did not have the possibility to consult this volume).

⁷⁰ WEBB 1985, 326.

course of future events, questions of life or death, were determined by reference to the natural features of animal shoulder blades (clean and white / blurred / patch of red, etc.), involving the cutting of incisions along the length of the bone. The excavators presumed this ritual was *apyromantic* because there is no evidence that the scapulae were subjected to heating or burning.⁷¹ The use of bovine scapulae is likely to be related to the fact that oxen were the chief sacrificial animals in urban cult buildings. Yet, it has to be noticed that incised ox scapulae are not exclusive to ritual contexts and are sometimes attested also in secular ones.⁷²

However, in the 1990s, Vassos Karageorghis, following Maurice Dunand and Manfred Bietak, questioned this interpretation, preferring an older hypothesis which considered these incised scapulae as artefacts used to produce sounds during religious ritual. In fact, scraped with a simple plectrum of bone or of wood, these scapulae produce a very clear and acute sound. Apart from the fact that other bones have been found bearing incisions the same way as scapulae, and that no fixed number of incisions has been recognized, the main argument for this hypothesis is the presence of wear, visible on some of the specimens.⁷³ In this hypothesis, the presence of incised scapulae in the Sanctuary of the Ingot God at Enkomi, in association with many broken terracottas from ring dance compositions, would be meaningful.⁷⁴ Interestingly, more information can be inferred about the connection between dances around a raised altar and maritime context in the Greek world. Ancient sources⁷⁵ tell us about particular dances performed by mariners around an altar (of the *bomos* type) in the Cycladic island of Delos, where merchant sailors performed ritual dances of Cretan origin to the accompaniment of the lute for the safety of their ships. According to Lillian B. Lawler's interpretation of Callimachus' text: "all merchant mariners passing the island stopped for the express purpose of performing the rite, even in bad weather, perhaps especially in bad weather".⁷⁶ It is also interesting to notice that in this passage, which links

⁷¹ About (em)pyromancy, see HALLIDAY 1913, 184-185; ILES JOHNSTON 2008, 98, 128.

⁷² Also, we have to keep in mind that these artefacts should not be exclusively associated with public ritual practices; on the contrary, their usage was either purely secular or involved private divination procedures; WEBB 1999, 249.

⁷³ KARAGEORGHIS 1990, 159.

⁷⁴ WEBB 1999, 250.

⁷⁵ Callim., *Hymn* 4, 316-324, and schol.

⁷⁶ Cf. LAWLER 1944.

Crete and Delos, the island of Delos is described as the “accommodating *hearth* of islands”.⁷⁷

4.2 Incised scapulae and hearths

Actually, the best context associating a monumental and symbolic central hearth with incised scapulae, as well as other paraphernalia, is documented in the South Levant. In Tel Miqne-*Ekron*, several cow shoulder blades were found in a public building situated in the core of the city in an “*elite zone*”, gathering monumental buildings. This context is connected with the Sea People, established there in Philistia, and shows strong bounds with the Greek mainland and Cyprus. In the Stratum VI of Building 351 (end of the 12th century BC) incised scapulae with parallel lines along their upper edge appear in association with a hearth room.⁷⁸ According to the excavators, the scapula was probably used by the Philistines for divination practices, to divine a message from the god.⁷⁹ But here also, the purpose of the notches is uncertain; musicologists suggest that these incisions may have been cut in order to produce a musical sound when the bone was waved in the air or when another object, perhaps a stick, was stroked across the bone. As for the origins of the scapulae from Ekron, the authors suggest a strong connection with the Aegean and Cyprus where these artefacts are most anciently attested,⁸⁰ but other scholars prefer to connect this practice as deriving from a much older tradition from western Asia.⁸¹

5. Attempt to reconsider the platform of Temple 4

5.1 Gaming stones in Cyprus: General considerations

In the 1980s, Stuart Swiny recorded 114 gaming stones from sites all over the island of Cyprus; many of these stones have cup-holes on both sides and were classified as “bifacial gaming stones”.⁸² Nowadays, on the island,

⁷⁷ Callim., *Hymn* 4, 325 (ιστίη ὃ νήσων εὐέστικε).

⁷⁸ For a general overview of the archeological context of this building, cf. LAMAZE 2014, 254-255, fig. 17, with previous references.

⁷⁹ DOTHAN – DOTHAN 1992, 242; significantly, this hearth room produced a gaming piece in the shape of a chess pawn (DOTHAN – DOTHAN 1992, 248), as well as a fragmentary *kernos* (DOTHAN 1990, 28, with references).

⁸⁰ DOTHAN – DOTHAN 1992, 242.

⁸¹ SNODGRASS 1994, 171-172.

⁸² SWINY 1980; see also SWINY 1976 and CRIST 2016.

over 400 examples are known.⁸³ Moreover, it has been successfully proven that the design of 3x10 holes derived from the game of *Senet*, whereas that of spirals must probably be related to the game of *Mehen*, both adopted from Egypt.⁸⁴ However, it must be mentioned that the interpretation of these stones with depressions ('cup-marks' or '*cupules*') as gaming stones, used only for games, is far from being totally accepted amongst the scholars, especially in Bronze Age contexts. The same issue has also been raised about the Cretan specimens from the Bronze Age.⁸⁵ However, as far as the artefacts from our chronology are concerned, their use as gaming stones is currently accepted, though, according to V. Karageorghis, they "may not be completely devoid of ritual significance",⁸⁶ or even used for divination.⁸⁷

5.2 The platform of Temple 4

Due to its state of preservation, the actual board on the table in the middle of the main hall of Temple 4 at Kition only presents a 3x7 holes design, but we may restore without any doubt a 3x10 board. Therefore, there is a strong probability that the game played on the table was a version of the game of *Senet*, a game of both luck and skill.⁸⁸

The general lack of attestation of gaming pieces in context with gaming stones has sometimes comforted some scholars to refute their use as gaming tables, as discussed above. Just to note in passing that these gaming pieces might have been as simple as pebbles, seeds, beans, shells, beads, or small sticks of wood. In the situation of Temple 4, it might be of interest to mention the discovery of an ivory stick with incised signs, found in Room 38C, between Floors IIIA and III. It has 29 preserved holes drilled through the upper and lower surfaces, while on the sides there are incised signs, including single strokes and groups of short vertical strokes. The grouping of vertical marks might represent numbers. The Cypro-Minoan characters are carved in the same way, with spacing similar to the vertical marks,

⁸³ CRIST 2016; CRIST [poster]; see also FOURRIER 2003, for the gaming stones from Amathus.

⁸⁴ See references mentioned *supra* and HILLBOM 2003, 38.

⁸⁵ On the topic see KARAGEORGHIS 1985, 242; FOURRIER 2003, esp. the conclusion 94-95; FOURRIER 2004, esp. 274; CUCUZZA 2010, esp. 142.

⁸⁶ KARAGEORGHIS 1985, 242.

⁸⁷ SMITH 2009, 155f.

⁸⁸ Cf. PICCIONE 1980; see also HILLBOM 2003, 39. About a recent attempt to better understand the controversial origin (chronologically and geographically) of the *Senet* game, and the role of Cyprus inside this issue see CRIST 2021.

which suggest that their meaning may be tied to the vertical notations. The interpretation of this object is difficult. Until now, it has sometimes been interpreted as a metric⁸⁹ or tally stick.⁹⁰ But, in the above-mentioned context of gaming stones related to this building, one may wonder if this (reused?)⁹¹ artefact might not have been used as a casting stick for games and/or divination?⁹² Anyway, the precedent hypotheses are not incompatible also with a use for game and/or oracular practices. For instance, the game of *Senet* had developed with the time a deeply religious significance.⁹³ Apart from this ivory artefact, one should mention small finds (terracotta balls, a domed piece of glass, knucklebones, conus shells) from Area II that have been identified as possible gaming pieces, but none in context with Floor I, nor inside Temple 4. Still, their existence since Floors IIIA and III to Floor 3, and the fact that some specimens (hieratic ones, though) have been found nearby, like inside Temple 5, has also to be taken into consideration.⁹⁴

Concluding remarks

If the graffiti of ships and the presence of many anchors have led some specialists to hypothesize that in Temple 4, we might be dealing with a seafaring cult,⁹⁵ we should not forget the obvious special-purpose *élite* nature of the entire Area II, which served industrial, if not administrative functions.⁹⁶ As suggested by J. Webb, there seems to be an equal importance between seafaring cult, metallurgy and maritime trade at Kition.⁹⁷ In trying to identify this building, we actually re-play the well-known issue of gaming stones: ‘for games or for gods?’. Anyway, each theory is not exclusive, and this apparent dichotomy may be a total anachronism. On this matter, Henri van Effenterre had reconciled both hypotheses, saying:

⁸⁹ KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 335, pls CXXII, CXC VII.

⁹⁰ SMITH 2009, 60, fig. II.15.

⁹¹ First suggested by V. Karageorghis, the object would have been reused and, according to J. Smith, from an ivory handle (SMITH 2009, 60).

⁹² On the objects potentially used for casting lots in Area II, cf. SMITH 2009, 156-157f.

⁹³ PICCIONE 1980.

⁹⁴ For an overview on these probable gaming pieces, cf. SMITH 2009, 156-159; for the gaming hypothesis about conus shells, cf. REESE 1985, 353, *contra* SMITH 2009, 159.

⁹⁵ BASCH – ARTZY 1985, 323; WEBB 1999, 184-185.

⁹⁶ KNAPP 2008, 228.

⁹⁷ WEBB 1999, 187.

[n]’est-ce pas surtout une perspective bien trop moderne qui nous fait opposer en l’occurrence religion et jeu de hasard ? Le jeu de hasard est l’une des formes, et non des moins répandues dans le monde antique, de la communication avec la divinité. La consultation par les sorts est un acte religieux.⁹⁸

Concerning Kition Temple 4, J. Smith expresses the same idea by saying that “[b]oard games were used in divining the future and as bridges for communication with the dead”.⁹⁹

Focusing on the trapezoidal platform built near the centre of the main hall in Temple 4, we have to admit that this would be the only fixed gaming table attested in the middle of a room. In the Greek world, textual evidence, like Homer, or some archaeological contexts, seem to imply that, generally speaking, the place for games was rather near entrances, outside the buildings, in the open air. Yet, this apparent *hapax* from Kition might indicate on the contrary that this *space syntax* of games next to a fireplace might not have been rare in antiquity, *a fortiori* because, most of the time, portable gaming tables were used. Still, this *hapax* is more notably striking when considering the fact that even outside Cyprus, in the Eastern Mediterranean in general, it seems that there is not any equivalent of the gaming table of Kition. With this in mind, and since the blocks were reused,¹⁰⁰ we might also take into consideration the possibility that they were not in use anymore at the time of the construction of this built-platform. In this hypothesis, we might even suppose that the whole structure was covered with plaster, even if at the time of its discovery only the side limiting the hearth conserved patches of a plaster lining.¹⁰¹ Or, we might consider it was a lucky reusing, since the height (40/50 cm) was totally acceptable to play seated on chairs and is comparable with the height encountered for other gaming stones *in situ*. But, in general, as far as central hearth buildings are concerned, the *space syntax* observed elsewhere and for a long period is rather to have a gaming stone outside, near the main entrance, not inside.¹⁰² Moreover, the fact

⁹⁸ VAN EFFENTERRE 1955, 546.

⁹⁹ SMITH 2009, 155.

¹⁰⁰ For other contexts where gaming stones have been reused in the constructions of Area II, cf. KARAGEORGHIS 1985, 242.

¹⁰¹ KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 150.

¹⁰² Gaming stone inside rooms seems rare in Aegean contexts, cf. HILLBOM 2003, 17 and fig. 5.

that most of these slabs were embedded in or close to transition spaces or passages has been noticed by Fernand Chapouthier who associated gaming stones with the notion of passage or rightly of transition.¹⁰³ Still, this notion would not be out of place at all at Kition Area II, in the situation of stopping-off point for merchant-mariners.

Besides, the burnt and unburnt animal bones, along with the sherds from the hearth, and the existence of storerooms, seem to indicate that meals took place inside Temple 4 main hall. This context of storage and commensality in association with (ritual?) games seems to find parallels also in Crete. Apart from the Iron Age context of the Azoria *kernoï* already mentioned and involving an important political aspect, in Crete, the gaming stones of the Minoan palaces, which can be both interpreted in matter of game or cult, seem to prove that a link existed between storage and ritualized games. According to the scholars, in the Minoan palaces, redistributive activities could have been carried out as part of a religious rite, including the use of “slabs with depressions” for a ritualized game.¹⁰⁴

Anyway, apart from commensality practices, the *sacred area* of Kition testifies, above all, to *élite* buildings as documented by the labour invested in these ashlar constructions.¹⁰⁵ If, on the one hand, the wealth of Kition might derive from local skilled craft activities such as textile, metallurgy and ivory, on the other hand, as a seaport, this wealth was fed by shipping products – not to mention that in antiquity the merchants and owners of the ships were people from the *élite*. The fact that commensality is not absent in Temple 4, which has an obvious, deep and strong link with merchant-mariners, might suggest that this ashlar building was at least a place of interaction between different groups of people. Among these monumental buildings, one should think of the existence of some sort of head office for corporations, meaning the local merchants, the *élite* in charge with all sorts of production (anchors, ropes, sails¹⁰⁶, ceramics, and so on) in contact with merchant-mariners coming from the Levant and making their first stop

¹⁰³ CHAPOUTHIER 1928.

¹⁰⁴ See CUCUZZA 2010; the author calls these gaming stones “slabs with depressions” for obvious reasons of interpretative neutrality, suggesting that it is unlikely that these gaming stones were simply game boards.

¹⁰⁵ Some stones are thought to have been brought by boat. On the consideration of ashlar building vs mudbrick building, cf. SMITH 2009, 80.

¹⁰⁶ Sails were one of the productions of Kition, as indicate the weight and width of textiles made in the workshop, cf. SMITH 2009, 80, with references.

before going westward. In this context, games, as it has been highlighted by anthropological approaches, played a strong role as social lubricants between people, especially in cross-cultural interactions,¹⁰⁷ an idea which has a strong support in Kition-*Kathari's* harbour, a liminal space, *par excellence*, in the words of J. Smith, “between land and sea, between known and unknown”.¹⁰⁸

Also, one can imagine all the different opportunities and moments to wait and to pass the time in a seaport. Mariners waiting for repairs, cargo loading, provisioning, without forgetting places to bargain, the situations of bad weather forcing the whole crew to stay on land. It was perhaps in these same timeslots that the mariners made graffiti. In this vein, it has to be mentioned that in Eastern Crete, on the summit of Mount Oxa, a mountain situated just South of Ancient Olous (modern Elounda), in the situation of border between two cities, H. van Effenterre has found a Greek inscription, whose exact restitution is uncertain, mentioning a *naumachia*, very probably the name of a game.¹⁰⁹ Near this inscription, on the rock, are a series of cup-holes (both linear and circular type), as well as engravings, such as boats.¹¹⁰ These have been related by the scholar to the soldiers sent by Olous to keep a garrison on the southern border of the city, who needed to pass the time, playing *naumachia*, that is battleship – most probably among other games.

Turning back to Cyprus, these concerns do not exclude at all symbolic and ritual significances of the action of playing (as well maybe of representing ships), since it involved fate and good fortune. J. Smith expresses this idea in these words:

¹⁰⁷ See CRIST *et alii* 2016. According to the authors, the distribution of some gaming tables (namely the Game of Twenty Squares) in Cyprus suggests their use as a social lubricant in cross-cultural interaction, promoting social exchanges between indigenous Cypriots *élites* and foreign traders, coming to the island for its copper resources. They would have been used a “as a sort of lingua franca for the elites” of the Eastern Mediterranean (CRIST *et alii* 2016, 189). Their anthropological approach shows that in the Near Eastern Bronze Age, board games are situated as liminoid practices – which lie outside the bounds of normative social behaviour and allow for interaction across social boundaries. The discussion tends to show that double-sided game boards (with the games of *Senet*, *Mehen* and Twenty Squares), might have corresponded to an indigenous game on one side and a newly introduced game on the other, providing evidence for social interactions and indigenization of some games.

¹⁰⁸ SMITH 2009, 162.

¹⁰⁹ See VAN EFFENTERRE 1955, 547, with references to ancient literary sources concerning a game called *naumachia*, and the transcription of the rupestrian inscription from Mount Oxa, with the occurrence of this term. On *naumachia* see also NELSON 2020.

¹¹⁰ VAN EFFENTERRE 1955, 547-548; HOOD 1974, 108; HILLBOM 2003, 60, 75 (no. 101-102).

[a] gaming stone formed part of the surface of the table next to the hearth, incorporating the element of risk or chance into this structure marked with ships and placed so close to the port. Measures both practical and symbolic would have been taken by those at Kition to ensure the safe passage of ships and their sailors.¹¹¹

To conclude, the central position of the hearth and altar seems to have been convenient to gather around, not to mention the possibility of round ritual dances. With the smoke, which was visible from the harbour, like a signal, we have here all the elements of a focal point. The least we can say about the gaming stones associated with Temple 4 is that their presence marks a place of interactions between different groups of people, and obviously, a place of commensality – the hearth testifies, at least, of consumption of animals. The presence of water with the wells seems also indicative of activities of feasting, or even, maybe, sacrificial practices (to clean, wash, drink) in order to please the gods and ask for their protection on the sea.

At the same time, nothing can contradict the idea that this building might have been used for more prosaic activities, by gathering merchant-mariners during their stopover, where drinking and meals were celebrated around a fireplace, playing games, and through them consulting the gods on their fate. The fireplace might indicate nocturnal activities, whereas the presence of specific shovels for charcoals and ashes suggests a frequent use. Maybe the best way to interpret this building is to see it at the cross-road of secular and ritual activities. In the Near East, for example, temples had a multiplicity of functions that might surprise us, all sort of daily and human activities cohabited within cult places.¹¹²

¹¹¹ SMITH 2009, 82.

¹¹² See CHARPIN 2017.

Illustrations

Fig. 1. Kition-*Kathari* (Cyprus), Area II, situation and plan of Temples 4 and 5, during use phase of Floor I. After SMITH 2009, 44-45, fig. II.5.

Fig. 2. Kition-*Kathari* (Cyprus), Area II, Temple 4, Room 38, Floor I, plan and elevation of the central hearth and altar (modified after SMITH 2009, 82, fig. III.2), and view of the altar from the West (after KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, pl. CV, 6).

Fig. 3. Ayios Konstantinos, peninsula of Methana (Peloponnese), Building Z (so-called “*megaron*”), view from the West (modified after KONSOLAKI-IANNOPOULOU 2004, 87, fig. 17), and its related andesite *kerros* (after KONSOLAKI-IANNOPOULOU 2004, 88, fig. 19).

Fig. 4. Dimini (Thessaly), Mycenaean palatial compound of “Iolkos”, plan of the so-called “*Megaron B*” (after ADRIMI-SISMANI 2007, 163, fig. 15.3.), and detail of the limestone slab with depressions (author’s picture).

Fig. 5. Vronda-*Kavousi* (Eastern Crete), LM IIIC settlement, plan of the Building A-B, with indication of the disposition (after DAY *et alii* 2009, fig. 6) and detail of a flat paving stone with depressions, view from the West (after DAY *et alii* 1986, pl. 77, fig. 6).

Fig. 6. Citadel of Kastro-*Kavousi* (Eastern Crete), plan of Building H (Room 27 and 38) giving access to a large courtyard (Room 1) (after COULSON *et alii* 1997, 336, fig. 13), and detail of the gaming stone from the courtyard (after GESSELL *et alii* 1985, pl. 94, d).

Fig. 7. Azoria-*Kavousi* (Eastern Crete), plan of the “Monumental Civic Building” showing the location of the three *kerroi* (modified after HAGGIS *et alii* 2011, 18, fig. 10), with picture of each specimen (after HAGGIS *et alii* 2011, 23, fig. 1-3).

Fig. 8. Kition-*Kathari* (Cyprus), Area II, distribution of anchor stones inside the constructions. After WEBB 1999, 186, fig. 71.

Abbreviations

EO = Early Orientalizing

LC = Late Cypriot

LG = Late Geometric

LH = Late Helladic

LM = Late Minoan

MM = Middle Minoan

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Board games equipment from archaeological contexts in archaic Attica

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Abstract. This paper addresses the question of the presence of gaming equipment (painted gaming tables and dice) in Attic tombs of the 7th and 6th century BC. It is argued that this type of funerary goods, whether functional at once, or not, have acquired a specific social and ideological meaning related to the notion of leisure, specifically destined to the upper classes. They first appear in the early 7th century, when such equipment must have been a rarity in mainland Greece, and their use was revived during the first third of the 6th century BC, a period of polarization between the aristocracy and the rest of the Athenian population.

Board games, gaming tables, die, funerals, Attica

Περίληψη. Το παρόν άρθρο (απευθύνει το ερώτημα της ύπαρξης εξοπλισμού για το παιχνίδι (γραπτές τράπεζες παιχνιδιού και ζάρι) σε αττικούς τάφους του 7^{ου} και 6^{ου} αιώνα π.Χ. Διατυπώνεται η υπόθεση ότι τα κτερίσματα αυτού του τύπου, είτε χρησιμοποιήθηκαν κάποτε είτε όχι, απέκτησαν ένα συγκεκριμένο κοινωνικό και ιδεολογικό νόημα σχετικό με την με την έννοια της ραστώνης, που προοριζόταν ειδικά για τις ανώτερες τάξεις. Εμφανίζονται αρχικά κατά τον πρώιμο 7^ο αιώνα π.Χ., όταν τέτοιου είδους αντικείμενα πρέπει να ήταν σπάνια στην ηπειρωτική Ελλάδα, ενώ η χρήση τους αναβιώνει κατά τη διάρκεια του πρώτου τρίτου του 6^{ου} αιώνα π.Χ., μια περίοδο πόλωσης μεταξύ της αριστοκρατίας και του υπόλοιπου αθηναϊκού πληθυσμού.

Επιτραπέζια παιχνίδια, τράπεζες παιχνιδιών, ζάρι, ταφικά, Αττική

Riassunto. L'articolo esamina la questione della presenza di strumenti da gioco, quali tavole da gioco dipinte e dadi, in tombe dell'Attica databili al VII e VI secolo a.C. Si argomenta l'ipotesi che tali oggetti di corredo, funzionali o meno, abbiano acquisito in tomba uno specifico significato sociale e ideologico legato alla nozione di svago e specificamente destinato alle classi superiori. Le prime attestazioni di tali oggetti si datano all'inizio del VII secolo a.C. e costituiscono in questa fase una rarità nella Grecia continentale; il loro uso viene ripreso durante il primo terzo del VI secolo a.C., quando strategie di rappresentazione funeraria marcano una spiccata contrapposizione tra l'aristocrazia e il resto della popolazione ateniese.

Giochi da tavolo, tavole da gioco, dado, riti funerari, Attica

Introduction

During the 7th and early 6th centuries BC, the practice of furnishing burials with dice and gaming boards bearing painted decoration became relatively popular in Attica.¹ This paper explores the phenomenon proposing an explanation for it. In order to fully appreciate the chronological, geographic and social context of this short-lived funerary fashion, it is necessary to obtain a full understanding of the evidence concerning the archaeology of dice and gaming boards in the archaic Greek world.²

Dice are by no means a conspicuous item of the archaeological record in Greece and there is no comprehensive account of finds that I am aware of. In general, they appear in four types of archaeological contexts: in public areas of commercial interest, in domestic assemblages, in sanctuaries, and in burials. Most of the finds belong to the first category, especially those from Corinth and the Agora of Athens, dating from the 5th century BC down to the late Roman period. Several finds of dice probably came from gambling houses or taverns, such as the group of seven bone dice from a well in the Athenian Agora, dating to the 3rd century AD. Other finds are reported from the harbours of Mytilene and Antikyra in Phokis.³ All these dice were apparently used for gambling, which is otherwise documented by three inscribed lead tablets of the Archaic period from a deposit in Corfu bearing references to debts in dice games, and by countless literary references.⁴

The earliest find from a domestic context is a pair of limestone dice from Lefkandi discovered in a trench containing Archaic material, although the excavators consider it possible that the dice date to the late 8th century.

¹ I would like to thank the organizers for inviting me to present this paper. Special thanks are due to Christos Zaphreopoulos, Barbara Carè, Katia Margariti and Maria Chidiroglou, for their assistance. Last, but not least, I would like to thank the reviewers for their valuable comments.

² This survey, by no means exhaustive, mainly deals with published material from excavations.

³ DAVIDSON 1952, 221-222, nos. 1738-1751 (Corinth); AD 47, B1 (1992), 17 (Agora); AD 54, B2 (1999), 752 (Mytilene); AD 35, B1 (1981), 261 (Antikyra). Note also a rhomboidal dice from a dump fill in Piraeus (context of 87-86 BC), mentioned in LAMBROTHANASSI – TOULOUMTZIDOU 2016, 83. A deposit on the Acropolis of early Hellenistic Edessa was interpreted as belonging to a workshop. A curious die with symbols was included in the assemblage: ALEVIZOU 2020, 27-28 (Edessa). On the other hand, the dice and game counters from a tavern in Delos belong to a board game: CHATZIDAKIS 1997, 294. A pair of dice, undoubtedly belonging to the sailors aboard, were found in the Point Léquin A shipwreck (LONG – SOURISSEAU 2002, 50-54).

⁴ Diphilus, fr. 74; Lys. 16.9-21; Cratinus, *Pytine*, fr. 208; Aeschin., *In Tim.*, 1, 4; Isoc., *Antid.*, 15, 287. Corfu tablets: CALLIPOLITIS 1961, 126-128, pl. 77a. Dice rolls are mentioned in an Attic *defixio* from Phaleron, binding the owners of a tavern: LAMONT 2015, 170.

If their suggestion is true, then this is the earliest occurrence of dice in Greece after the Bronze Age.⁵ Other finds from houses are reported for Archaic Oropos in Attica and Krousson in Crete, Late Archaic Stagira in Thrace and Chios in the Aegean, 4th century Olynthus, Hellenistic Corfu, Delos and Sparta, as well as Roman Kastelli in Crete and Megalo Gardiki on Kastri Hill in Epirus.⁶ Dice have also been found in buildings with a military function, as for example in Phyle in Attica, Early Byzantine Edessa in Macedonia and various locations of the late Classical and Hellenistic Thrace.⁷

Finds from sanctuaries first appear in the 7th century. The list of sites includes the Acropolis of Athens, the Eleusinian sanctuary of Eleusis, the sanctuary of Artemis in Brauron, the sanctuary of Athena Pallene and another for an unknown deity in modern Gerakas; the sanctuaries of Artemis Limnatis in Messenia, Artemis Orthia near Sparta, Hermes in Laconian Aigies, Pan in Arcadian Kotylos, Delphi, the Korykeian Cave, a sanctuary dedicated to a female deity in Vryokastraki off Kythnos, a portico facing a Classical temple in Kephallonia, the sanctuaries of Athena Lindia in Rhodes and Diomedes on the island of Palagruza in the Dalmatic coast.⁸ Although

⁵ POPHAM – SACKETT – THEMELIS 1981, I, 82, 86, nos. 26-27, pl. 66q-r. Earlier material tentatively associated to board games has been recovered from Iron Age tombs in Knossos and Kavoussi: CATLING – COLDSTREAM 1996, 624-625. On Bronze Age board games in Crete and Cyprus see HILLBOM 2000-2001; WHITTAKER 2002.

⁶ Alexandros Mazarakis-Ainian, pers. comm. (Oropos); AD 38, B2 (1982), 355 (Krousson); 51, B2 (1996), 454 (Stagira); 54, B2 (1999), 771 (Chios); ROBINSON 1941, 504, no. 2570, pl. 164 (Olynthus); AD 56-59, B5 (2001-2004), 255 (Corfu); 61, B1 (2006), 275 (Sparta); DEONNA 1938, 331-332 (Delos); AD 49, B2 (1994), 725 (Kastelli); PLIAKOU 2015, 29 (Megalo Gardiki, a single die and some counters, 1st BC-2nd AD). Two Classical dice from Western Thessaly come from unspecified contexts that are possibly domestic: AMK 595 (Kedros) and 1574 (Mataranga). I would like to thank Ch. Karagiannopoulos for bringing these to my attention.

⁷ AD 56-59, B1 (2001-2004), 132, 134, fig. 30 (Phyle, 4th c.); AD 62, B2 (2007), 927 (Edessa). NANKOV 2013 (Thrace). The association of soldiers with dice is apparent in a passage by Polybius (39.3; cf. Strabo 8.6.23) describing how after the sack of Corinth in 146 BC, the Roman soldiers of Mummius played dice on the famous painting *Dionysus* by Aristides. Athenian citizen soldiers playing dice before the attack of Peisistratus in Pallene: Hdt. 1.63. See BOARDMAN 1978.

⁸ GRAEF – LANGLITZ 1925, 259, nos. 2694-2696 (Acropolis); KOKKOU-VIRIDI 1999, 253, Γ 26, pl. 36 (Eleusis), PAPADIMITRIOU 1959, 19, pl. 15c (Brauron); AD 54, B1 (1999), 107 (Pallene); AD 60, B1 (2005), 132, 134, fig. 30 (Gerakas); KOURSOU MIS 2014, 201, fig. 11 (Limnatis); DAWKINS 1929, 237, pl. 166, no. 1 (Orthia); BONIAS 1998, 94, 207, no. 520, pl. 61 (Aigies); *ArchEph* 1903, 179 (Kotylos); DEONNA 1938, 332, n. 1 (Delphi); JACQUEMIN 1984, 170, no. 13, fig. 13 (Korykeian cave); Alexandros Mazarakis-Ainian, pers. comm. (Vryokastraki, pottery die of archaic date); AD 56-59, B5 (2001-2004), 180 (Kephallonia); BLINKENBERG 1931, 157, no. 475, pl. 17 (Lindos); KIRIGIN –

playing dice is an activity attested for sanctuaries,⁹ most of the objects must be regarded as offerings.¹⁰

Dice in tomb contexts appear for the first time in Eleutherna, Central Crete. A single pottery die in the area K of rich family funerary pyres¹¹ cannot be associated with a specific burial. All the cremated individuals are adults, males and females whose ages range from 19 to 55 years. The tombs are dated from the 9th to 7th centuries BC by the associated ceramic material; the date of the die cannot be established with accuracy, but the stratigraphy of the excavation points to the later period of occupation of the burial plot, in the late 8th to 7th centuries BC.

1. Gaming Tables

For more accurately dated material, one must turn to Attica. The earliest evidence comes from two funerary pyres in Vari, apparently connected with the same burial.¹² The finds include vases of various shapes (oinochoai, high foot cups, drinking cups), of which most notable is a loutrophoros-hydria pointing to the deceased, possibly a female, as being unmarried and having died untimely,¹³ a gaming table decorated with carelessly modelled plastic figures of mourners atop the corners of the upper surface (Fig. 1), as well as a pottery die with painted decoration. The surviving foot of the table is decorated with a floral executed in the outline technique, so typical of the Attic pottery during the mid-7th century. The upper surface is divided into five uneven areas by incised ridges crossing the width of the table and ending in circular cavities. Most scholars believe that the gaming table was used for the game of the *Five Lines*.¹⁴

JOHNSTON – VUČETIĆ – LUŠIĆ 2009, 141 (Palagruza). Finds from Naucratis (THOMAS 2017, 16, n. 172-177, archaic to Roman) and Tell Defenneh (LECLÈRE – SPENCER 2016, 87, 6th c. BC) in Egypt could either come from sanctuaries or from secular buildings.

⁹ Men., *Epit.*, 474-504: men playing dice, while women attend the festival of Artemis Tavropolos in Alai Araphenides in Attica.

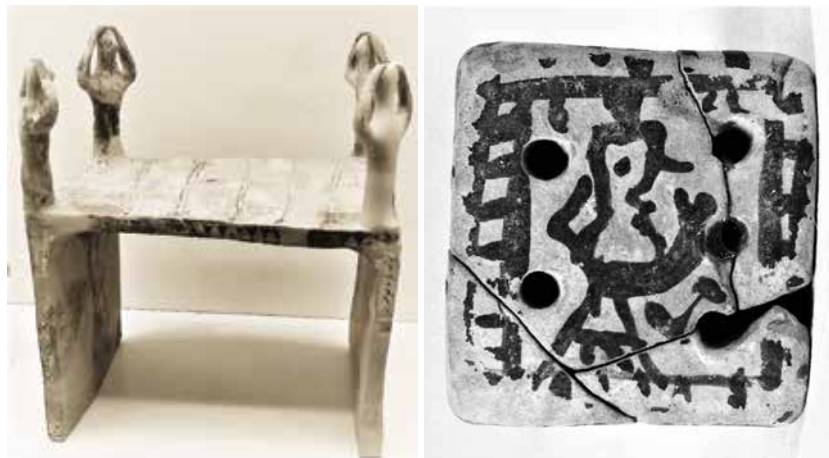
¹⁰ The bronze die from the sanctuary of Orthia (cited above, n. 8) bears a dedication to Orthia from Eilytheia, the goddess of childbirth. It has been suggested that the offering was made by a pregnant woman; see POMEROY 2002, 112-113.

¹¹ STAMPOLIDIS 1990, 390, fig. 19.

¹² CALLIPOLITIS 1963, 123-124, 172, pl. 53-55; SCHÄDLER 2009a, 176, fig. 1. For the full list of Attic gaming tables see also CHIDIROGLOU – SCHÄDLER – SCHIERUP 2022, in press.

¹³ SABETAI 2009, 296.

¹⁴ For references and discussion, see SCHÄDLER 2009a; KIDD 2017 (with a different proposal regarding the rules of the game).



Figs. 1-2

Numerals on the die (Fig. 2) are represented by spots drilled on the surface of the clay, as was customary on earlier pottery dice. The person who drilled the spots was careful so as not to destroy the images. Note the peculiar rendering of number five with three spots on one side and two on the other, flanking a female figure drawn in a very poor style. This woman is wearing a polos and is depicted performing the so-called “epiphany gesture”. Six has two rows of three spots flanking the figure of a woman, whom John Beazley tentatively identified as Athena holding an owl.¹⁵ One is decorated with a grazing horse. Two, four and three do not bear any figural decoration, but are adorned with series of lines joining vertically. The finds are dated to the second quarter of the 7th century.

Recently, another die of the same date was found among the debris removed for the construction of a mid-7th century tumulus in Anavyssos, and thus apparently comes from an earlier tomb. The decoration consists of triangles and dotted rosettes.¹⁶

There are two more 7th century dice with painted decoration, both of unknown context. The first is stylistically close to the Ram-Jug Painter, an artist working during the 2nd quarter of the century, in the so-called Black-and White Style (Fig. 3).¹⁷ Particularly noteworthy is the face showing number three: instead of putting the three holes in a line across the

¹⁵ In CALLIPOLITIS 1963, 124, n. 15.

¹⁶ Archaeological Museum of Brauron 5882, found in proximity to tumulus B of Anavyssos: KAKAVOGIANNI – PETROCHEILOS 2019, 180, fig. 298, 263.

¹⁷ Athens, National Archaeological Museum 19366: KARUZU 1973, pl. 53-55.

upper right and lower left corners, the painter designed three asymmetrical holes flanking the forepart of a horse. Some slight damage was done to the human face drawn in outline on the face bearing number two, with one hole drilled into the human's neck. Semni Karouzou identified the bearded man as Palamedes,¹⁸ the mythical inventor of dice and games, but the hypothesis lacks substantial foundation. Six is also peculiar, with the holes arranged in an almost circular pattern with uneven intervals. The other seventh century die, also kept in the National Museum of Athens bears linear and floral decoration, but no images.¹⁹ It is close in style and type of decoration to the Anavyssos die mentioned above.

The placing of a gaming table and a single die in a funerary pyre was a rite repeated in the Kerameikos several decades later.²⁰ Both finds come from the so-called Opferplatz E, an offering place containing material associated with a primary cremation burial. The table (Fig. 4) is of exactly the same type as the Vari specimen, except that all the mourners in this case face in the same direction, performing different gestures (although this could be a restorers' decision since the mourners are not fixed on the table). The horizontal plaque, roughly square in shape, is largely lost, but enough remains to establish that it was divided into five areas by parallel lines. Both feet of the table are



Figs. 3-4

¹⁸ KARUZU 1973, 59.

¹⁹ Athens, National Archaeological Museum: KARUZU 1973, pl. 56.

²⁰ KÜBLER 1970, 394-95, 512, no. 129; ROLLEY 1963a, 118, fig. 52; RICHTER 1968, fig. 171-172; KURTZ - BOARDMAN 1971, pl. 12; VERMEULE 1979, 78, fig. 33; WHITTAKER 2004, 280, fig. 1.

preserved, bearing figures of lions in Corinthianizing black-figure, typical of the years just after 600 BC. The foot of yet another example (15 cm. high) with a lion turning its head to look back depicted in an elaborate black-figure style is kept in the British Museum.²¹

The best-known model of a game board was acquired in 1882 by the National Museum in Copenhagen from a dealer in Athens.²² There is no doubt that it once belonged to an Attic funerary context. It is composed of numerous fragments, and some modern restorations in plaster are noted in the relevant publication. Its shape is different from the examples examined thus far: the upper surface is divided by nine incised lines with oval knobs at the ends, while two pottery dice are attached near the edges of each narrow side; perhaps a third one was placed in the middle of the board. Since the two surviving dice display the side bearing number six, it has been suggested that the missing one was also resting with the uppermost side showing the same number, so that the three would form a variant of the “lucky roll” of three sixes, the so-called “Fair Aphrodite”,²³ which however probably made no sense in a board game. This roll is represented on the curious triple ivory dice found in rich tombs of late archaic Etruria.²⁴ The oval knobs on each end of the incised lines probably represent the gaming pieces. A recent examination of the Copenhagen gaming table led to an alternative reconstruction, namely that the central square space marks the spot where a statuette was placed.²⁵ This is in line with Ulrich Schädler’s hypothesis about the *Five Lines* game having been played with a single die, based on the evidence from the Vari and Kerameikos tables, while variants using more lines, usually 9 or 11 (as in the case of the Copenhagen board and two Etruscan mirrors),²⁶ required two dice. The board is atop some kind of box, which rests on two

²¹ London 1947, 0516.1 (found or acquired in Athens):

https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=429199&partId=1&searchText=1947&images=true&page=18 (retrieved 13.4.2018).

²² Inv. 1950: BLINKENBERG 1898, 6, fig. 9; BREITENSTEIN 1941, 19, no. 171, pl. 19; PRITCHETT 1968, pl. 7.1; LUND – BUNDGAARD RASMUSSEN 1994, 67; SCHÄDLER 2009a, 180, fig. 5.

²³ Aesch., *Ag.*, 32; Diogenianus 5, 4; Eust., comm. in Od. 1.107. The mention in Horace, *Odes* 2.7.25, could refer to knucklebone throws (Aphrodite being called the throw when all four astragali fell on different sides), as certainly is the case in Luc., *Erotes* 16, and Cic., *Div.*, 1.13.23. See now COSTANZA 2019.

²⁴ TURFA 2005, 229, no. 246-247; BARDAGLI – IOZZO 2007, 225, no. 108. Not all *tesserae* show the same throw, however. See LOVERGNE 2020.

²⁵ SCHÄDLER 2009a, 180-181.

²⁶ SCHÄDLER 2009a, 173, fig. 3a-b; 179, fig. 4.

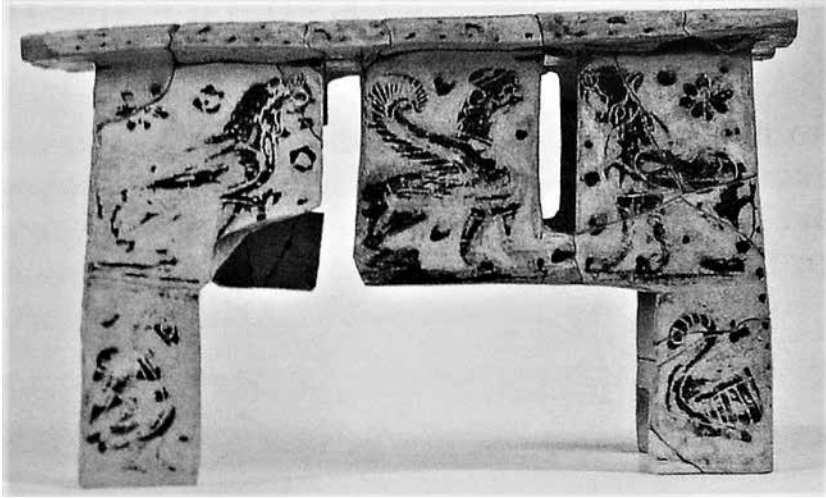


Fig. 5

feet running across the narrow sides. Each long side is decorated with three waterbirds and each short side with two similar birds and rosettes, executed in the careless style associated with the work of the Ragusa group,²⁷ a provincial Attic workshop active during the first quarter of the 6th century BC.²⁸

Two more gaming tables have been recently published. The first was sold by Bonham's in 2017 and acquired by the Musée Suisse du Jeu at La Tour-de-Peilz.²⁹ The second, not previously mentioned in board games literature, was recovered from a primary cremation burial consisting of three associated pyres in Merenda, Attica, in 2002 and is now on display in the Archaeological Museum of Brauron (Fig. 5). Other finds reported in the short publication report include a black-figured *lekane* and a high foot bowl decorated with a plastic protome.

The table was inadequately published, since it has been wrongly identified (as an offering table), wrongly dated (to the first half of the 7th century) and misattributed (to the Protocorinthian fabric).³⁰ It is interesting to note that the report also mentions a statuette of a mourner. In light of Schädler's suggestion that the square area marked out in the central part

²⁷ BOARDMAN 1998.

²⁸ On the attribution, see BOARDMAN 1998, 64, no. 53.

²⁹ *Bonham's Antiquities, Thursday 6 July 2017*, 57, no. 94, said to be from a "Private collection, Geneva, since the 1950s-1960s". See now SCHÄDLER 2019b, 98-99.

³⁰ PETROU – SALAVOURA – PITSIKOULIS – SKLAVOS – ARGYROPOULOS 2009, 132-134, fig. 13 (gaming table), 14 (*lekane*) and 15 (high foot cup). The identification as an offering table is repeated in AR 2010-2011, 41, 43, fig. 65.

of the Copenhagen table,³¹ in the centre of the so-called “sacred line”³² was the base of a statuette, it becomes evident that the mourner belongs with the table. The excavators wrongly associated it with the high foot cup decorated with a female protome³³ and it has consequently not been integrated into the table in the Brauron Museum.

An incomplete terracotta plaque of roughly the same dimensions as the aforementioned British Museum example was recently published and interpreted as a foot of a gaming table. It is decorated with a pair of confronted sphinxes in a style much more elaborate than the style of the Ragusa Group.³⁴ The context is a pit for a primary cremation that partially covered an earlier tomb, dating from the 580’s. Although it was not preserved, that tomb must have been an important one judging from the finds: along with the fragmentary table, there was a *lekane* decorated with female protomai, by or near the Ragusa Group, a skyphos by the KY Painter and other Attic and Corinthian vases of the same period.

The recently published tables in Brauron and La Tour-de-Peilz are nearly identical in shape and decoration; both belong, along with the Copenhagen table, to a variant of the *Five Lines* game that requires the use of two dice, as they have 9 or 11 lines. On the one from Merenda, a lion, a panther and a sphinx are depicted on each side, and birds are shown on the lower part of the feet; on the example once in the market, undoubtedly from a tomb in Attica, the feet are decorated with a panther, a lion and a fowl, while lions are depicted on the short sides. Both gaming boards, as well as the finds associated with the Merenda example and the Copenhagen table, are decorated by a single painter belonging to the Ragusa group.

2. Dice

It comes as no surprise that the same provincial Attic group also produced dice in the black-figured technique. Four are known to me: the first, once in the Vlasto collection and now on display in the National Archaeological

³¹ See above, n. 26. It must be noted that the square area on the Copenhagen table is small and oddly shaped for accommodating a statuette with an oval base, as those seen on the Vari and Kerameikos tables, or any other isolated example presently known (i.e. ROLLEY 1963a, 116-118; RICHTER 1968, fig. 329-330; KURTZ – BOARDMAN 1971, 77-78; DILLON 2002, 281-282).

³² On the sacred line see now KIDD 2017.

³³ Similar protomai are found on two similar cups by the Ragusa Group in Athens and the Acropolis Museum, respectively (BOARDMAN 1998, 63, nos. 40-41).

³⁴ Archaeological Museum of Brauron 5832: KAKAVOGIANNI – PETROCHEILOS 2019, 89, fig. 133, 254.

Museum of Athens, probably came from a tomb in Sounion,³⁵ undoubtedly one of those excavated in the area in the beginning of the 20th century. Each side is decorated with a waterbird flanked by black blobs of paint; those blobs render the holes representing the numerals practically invisible. Another specimen, almost identical to the one in the National Museum, is in Heidelberg (Fig. 6).³⁶ The faces are almost square, measuring 3.7 by 3.9 cm. Here, the numbers are more easily decipherable; the decoration is very similar, with large, unappealing waterbirds occupying each side of the cube. A die from Brauron, attributed to the same group, depicts lions and panthers.³⁷ It was found along with a specimen decorated with a carefully drawn rosette sometimes shown on early 6th century Attic vases.³⁸ The last specimen has a well-established context, since it was found on the Acropolis.³⁹ Its six faces are occupied by lions, sphinxes and women, subjects not only familiar from other dice and gaming tables of the same period, but also popular in the repertory of the Ragusa Group (Fig. 7).

Dice appear in a number of other Archaic and Classical tombs and pyres, for example in Phaleron,⁴⁰ Athens,⁴¹ Eretria, Boeotia,⁴² Sindos, Maroneia,

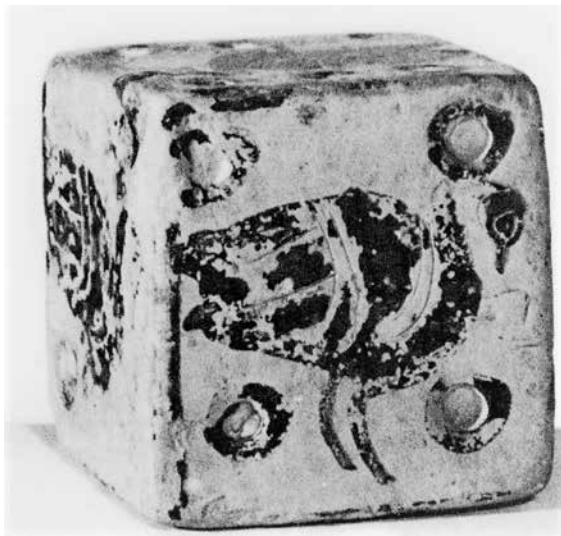


Fig. 6

³⁵ Athens, National Archaeological Museum BS 95: GADLOU – KAVVADIAS 2013, 21.

³⁶ Heidelberg 60/5: GROPPENGIESSER 1970, 16, pl. 141.11; HAMPE 1975, 31-32, no. 53; BOARDMAN 1998, 64, no. 56.

³⁷ PAPADIMITRIOU 1959, 20, pl. 15c; BOARDMAN 1998, 64, no. 55.

³⁸ E.g., PAPADOPOULOU-KANELLOPOULOU 1997, 39, no. 20-21, pl. 4.

³⁹ Athens, Acr. 2696: GRAEF – LANGLOTZ 1925, 259; KARUZU 1973, 57, fig. 1 (Corinthian); BOARDMAN 1998, 64, no. 54.

⁴⁰ Pers. comm. Anna Alexandropoulou.

⁴¹ From a tomb at Amerikis street (t.77), along with a glass oinochoe of the first half of the 5th c. BC: PARLAMA – STAMPOLIDIS 2000, 229-230. Another find, allegedly from Athens, is now in Copenhagen (inv. 1846: BLINKENBERG 1898, 14, fig. 10).

⁴² AD 29, B2 (1973-1974), 465, pl. 301η (Eretria, a pyre of the 7th c. BC); AD 51, B1 (1996), 273-274 (Akraiphia in Boeotia, which is further discussed by V. Sabetai in this volume together with its tomb group).

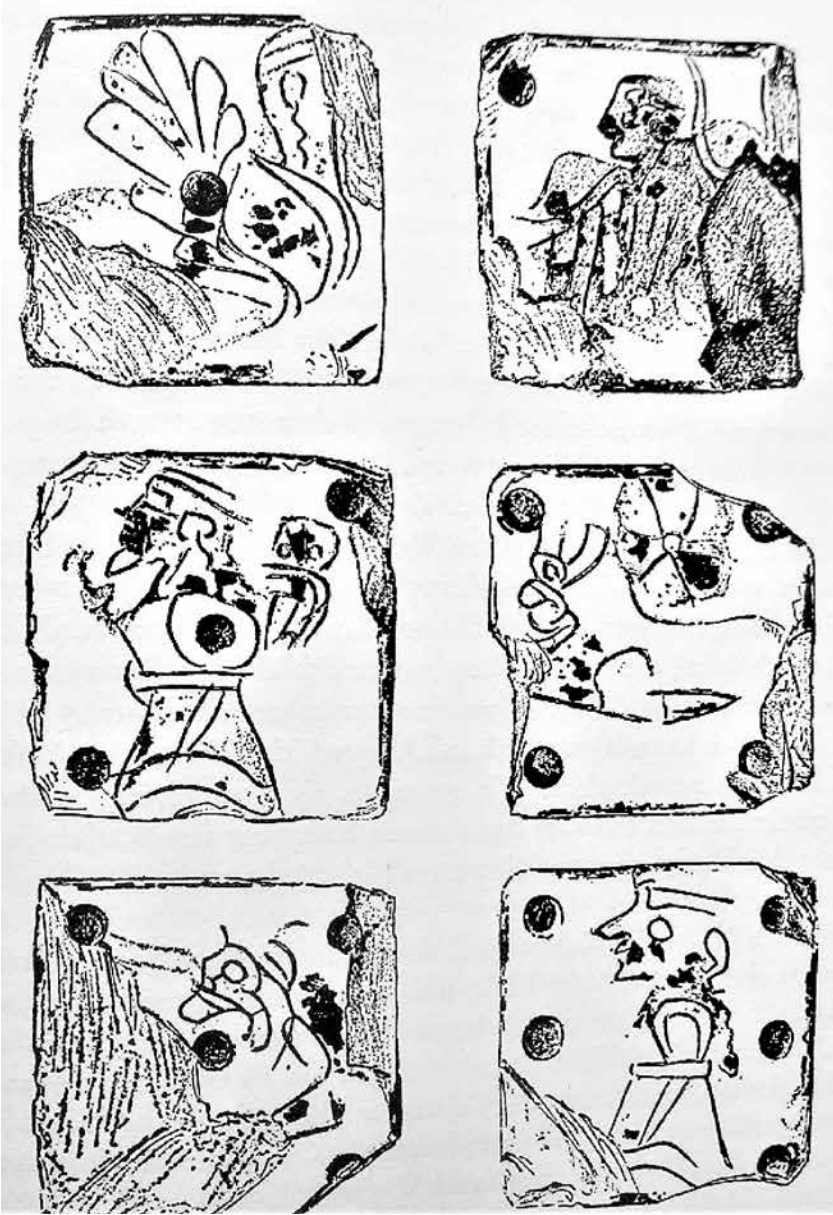


Fig. 7

Olynthus, and Taranto.⁴³ Many more finds from the late classical and Hellenistic periods are known.⁴⁴ On the other hand, gaming boards have been excavated in a variety of localities. An earlier list provided by Kendrick Pritchett, revised by Ulrich Schädler⁴⁵ and supplemented here with a handful of new finds,⁴⁶ enumerates stone and terracotta tables from sanctuaries (Perachora, Epidaurus, Amphiaraeion at Oropos, a sanctuary at Tempi in Thessaly), houses (Ambracia) and public areas (Acropolis of Goritsa in Thessaly, a well of a shop in the South Stoa of Corinth). To these, we should add boards engraved on the upper surface of the steps in sanctuaries (the Acropolis, the Propylaea of the Eleusinian sanctuary, the Letoon in Delos) and other stone constructions (on a rock on the Acropolis of Pharsalos and on the Justinianian wall in Corinth).⁴⁷ The latter serves as a reminder of

⁴³ VOKOTOPOULOU – MISAILIDOU – DESPINI – TIVERIOS 1985, 126, no. 196 (Sindos, gold-plated example of the 6th c.); ROBINSON 1942, 69 (Olynthus, t. 341, enchytrismos); WUILLEUMIER 1934 (Taranto, now in Trieste, inv. 412).

⁴⁴ DEONNA 1938, 332, n. 3 (Myrrhina); <https://www.pontosnews.gr/432577/ellada/zaria-paizane-sta-archaia-avdira> (Abdera); IGNATIADOU 1996 (Methone and Sebaste in Pieria); IGNATIADOU 2013, 214-218, 224-226 (Aiginion, tomb of 275 BC); 2016, 130; AD 56-59, B3A (2001-2004), 38 (Pydna); BESSIOS – NOULAS 2014, 136-139 (Koukkos, in the vicinity of Pydna, t. 5, last quarter of the 4th c. BC); AD 61, B2 (2006), 867 (Pella, Hellenistic); LAMBROTHANASSI – TOULOUNTZIDOU 2016, 82-88 (Xirokrini in Thessaloniki, three rhomboidal dice and 11 glass counters). See in general IGNATIADOU 2019 and ALEVIZOU 2020. NANKOV 2013 and TZOCHEV 2016 (Thrace); VANHOVE 1992, 184-185, nos. 41a-d (Ampurias, 4th c. BC). Glass counters, but without the dice, have been found in middle and late Hellenistic burials in various parts of Greece, Thrace and Italy (IGNATIADOU 2013, 212-219 and 2019; LAMBROTHANASSI – TOULOUNTZIDOU 2016, 85-86). The practice of placing dice in tombs survives well into late antiquity, through the Roman times. Examples are too numerous to be listed here. See KALTSAS – FACHARD – PSALTI – GIANNOPOULOU 2010, nos. 401-402 (Eretria); DAVIDSON 1952, 221-222, nos. 1740-1751 (Corinth); AD 32, B1 (1977), 182 (Corfou); AD 34, B2 (1979), 434 and AD 43, B2 (1988), 597 (Rhodes); AD 44, B2 (1989), 458, AD 47, B2 (1992), 576 and AD 53, B3 (1998), 848 (Crete); AD 47, B2 (1992), 428 (Thessaloniki); AD 61, B2 (2006), 991 (Philippi).

⁴⁵ PRITCHETT 1968; SCHÄDLER 2009a, 182-184. For the Roman period see also MIHAILESKU – BIRLIBA 2016 and TALLOEN 2018 (Sagalassos).

⁴⁶ There has been much discussion as to whether some of those tables, especially the ones with numerals like the examples from Oropos and Salamis, are game boards or abaci for counting. Schädler's cautious suggestion (2009a, 184) that they may have been used for both purposes is adopted here. On possible identification criteria and the use of five lines boards as abaci see V. Dasen and J. Gavin in this volume.

⁴⁷ DUNBABIN 1963, nos. 1326-1327 (Perachora; not for the *Five Lines* game); PRITCHETT 1968, 190-193, nos. 1-10 (Epidaurus, Amphiaraeion in Oropos and a well in Corinth); VITOS – EXARCHOU 2015, 38, fig. 4d (Tempi, engraved on a Laconian tile of the Hellenistic period); AD 54, B1 (1999), 468 (Ambracia, Hellenistic); VITOS – EXARCHOU 2015, 38, fig. 4a (Goritsa); VROOM 1999, 102, pl. IV-V (Eleusis); PRITCHETT 1968, 195-96, no. 13, pl. 5, 2-4; SCHÄDLER 2009a, 182-183, fig. 6-8 (Letoon of Delos); VITOS – EXARCHOU 2015, 38, fig. 4b (Acropolis of Pharsalos); AD 52, B1

the fact that board games were played in the public space, as is attested by a couplet in Euripides' *Medea*, referring to the elder Corinthians playing $\pi\epsilon\sigma\sigma\acute{o}\iota$ in the area of the fountain Peirene and the existence in Athens of a public square called $\Pi\epsilon\sigma\sigma\acute{o}\iota$, mentioned in a fragment by the comic poet Cratinus (fr. 7 K-A). Significantly, aside from the Attic examples, there are no finds from funerary contexts. This is a crucial point in itself, although we cannot rule out the possibility that boards of perishable material were used as grave goods.⁴⁸

To sum up the Attic evidence: gaming boards with a single pottery die have been discovered in the Vari and Kerameikos cemeteries, while the Copenhagen table has a pair of dice attached to the top surface. No dice are mentioned in the publication of the Merenda table, while the contexts of the La-Tour-de-Peilz table and the London foot are lost. On the other hand, painted dice are found in both tombs (Sounion and the examples in the National Museum of Athens) and sanctuaries (the Acropolis and Brauron), without any connection to gaming boards. Thus, isolated dice may be associated either with gambling or board games, the former being an activity invariably coloured with negative overtones in literature,⁴⁹ the latter usually considered as representing positive values.⁵⁰ However, since most examples of black-figured dice and gaming tables are by a single painter, they were more probably conceptually linked, although to that date, no gaming table by the Ragusa group was found in the same tomb with a die. This may be a coincidence, or the tables in question might have been accompanied by wooden dice that were fully burned in the pyre. Finally, it seems plausible to accept that the symbolic value assigned to board games in connection with those funerals was sufficiently expressed by the funerary use of the table and did not further require the destruction of a die.

(1997), 339, pl. 141b (Corinth, early Byzantine). Context unknown or unspecified: IGNATIADOU 2016, 130, fig. 1 (Abdera); SCHÄDLER 2009a, 182 (Eretria); PRITCHETT 1968, 193, pl. 4.1 (Salamis).

⁴⁸ Metal finds from tomb B in Derveni have been interpreted as belonging to a wooden gaming board (IGNATIADOU 2013, 213-214). The possibility that wooden boards were also included in other tombs of Macedonia is considered by LAMBROTHANASSI – TOULOUTZIDOU 2016, 87.

⁴⁹ Lys. 14.27 (Alcibiades' son "dicing away" his father's fortune), 16.9-21; Aeschin., *In Tim.*, 1.42; Theopomp., *FGrH*, 115 F 49 and Ar., *Plut.*, 243 (both connecting gambling and whore-hunting) Hor., *Carm.*, 3.24.54-8. Playing dice as a shameful activity: Xenophanes, fr. A16 DK apud Plut., *Mor.*, 530e. Dice-addiction: Ar., *Vesp.*, 75; [Hippocrates], *Humors* 9.2. See now VESPA 2020a.

⁵⁰ KURKE 1999, 259-261.

In any case, through the medium of painting and the process of miniaturization or over-elaboration, dice and gaming tables are dissociated from their original function, as is clear from the addition of the four plastic mourners on the tables from Vari and the Kerameikos, and perhaps a single mourner on the Copenhagen and Merenda tables. This is a well-known process for that period, especially in the case of the pottery placed in offering trenches and pits in the 7th and early 6th century Attica.⁵¹ At the same time, gaming equipment must be included to a group of objects with specific gender, status, age or religious significance, like the pottery eggs,⁵² the clay imitations of leather knucklebone bags,⁵³ or the spindle-whorls,⁵⁴ which served as funerary gifts or dedications. Objects of this kind form a large share of the Ragusa Group's production. There can be no doubt that these objects were made with a specific clientele in mind, located in the eastern part of Attica from Oinoe to Lavrion and Sounion, as far as the evidence from tombs reveals, but also frequenting all major sanctuaries in Attica (as well as nearby Kythnos and Aegina).⁵⁵

3. Function and symbolism of gaming tables and dice in Attic funerary contexts

It is now time to address the question of the function and symbolism of gaming tables and dice in funerary contexts in the 7th and early 6th century Attica. Emily Vermeule argued that in some areas of Greece, gaming became “a metaphor of chance, of winning and losing in an unreal world, the ultimate game with the last opponent”.⁵⁶ She further believed that the presence of game boards in tombs betrays Egyptian influence. This of course is in line with the famous assertion by Plato that dice, among writing and various mathematic arts, were invented by the Egyptian god

⁵¹ See in general WHITLEY 1994; HOUBY-NIELSEN 1996; ALEXANDRIDOU 2015.

⁵² Athens 12238: ROLLEY 1963b, 184, fig. 88 right; BOARDMAN 1998, 64, no. 52. Later black-figured eggs abound in the Kerameikos: ROLLEY 1963b, 183-184; BANOU – BOURNIAS 2014, 313.

⁵³ KEFALIDOU 2004.

⁵⁴ BOARDMAN 1998, 64, nos. 57-59 (Brauron, Istanbul and Thorikos Museums). There are numerous unpublished examples of painted spindle-whorls (some by the Ragusa Group) on display in the Acropolis Museum, from the Sanctuary of Nympe on the slopes of the Acropolis.

⁵⁵ On the distribution see BOARDMAN 1998.

⁵⁶ VERMEULE 1979, 77-82. On life as a throw of dice, see Pl., *Resp.*, 10, 604c-d; Plut., *Mor.*, 467A-B; Eur., *Supp.*, 329-331, cf. *Hipp.*, 718. Paus., 2.20.3, claims that Palamedes offered the dice he invented to the sanctuary of Tyche at Argos. On inscribed knucklebones on Hellenistic funerary monuments see FANTUZZI – HUNTER 2004, 331-335.

Thoth,⁵⁷ as well as with the preeminence of the game *Senet* in Egyptian funerary contexts.⁵⁸ This idea was further elaborated by Sarah Morris and John Papadopoulos, who also made a series of pertinent observations on the possible Late Geometric connection of games to funerals.⁵⁹ However, given the scarcity of dice in the archaeological record before the Greco-Roman period in Egypt,⁶⁰ and the abundance of similar finds in the Near East,⁶¹ oriental influence might also be at play here.⁶²

Donna Kurtz and John Boardman suggested that the addition of the mourners made the gaming boards of Vari and Kerameikos look like biers, thus making their inclusion to the goods offered to the deceased more appropriate.⁶³ Kurtz points out that the practice is exclusively Attic.⁶⁴ Other scholars regarded gaming equipment in tombs as “an essential or at least desirable adjunct to a pleasurable existence in the other world”,⁶⁵ based on a fragment of Pindar (fr. 129.66), where it is said of the pious in Hades: “some take delight in horses and exercises, others in *παισσοί*, and others in lyres, and among them complete happiness blooms and flourishes”. Needless to say, Pindar’s passage quoted by Plutarch and partly preserved in a papyrus fragment, came down to us without its proper context; as S. Morris and J. Papadopoulos aptly observed, there is nothing in the extant Greek literature to suggest that the idea of a happy afterlife connected to board games was widespread.⁶⁶

To be sure, Pindar’s passage connects daily experience of the pious in the afterlife with the pleasures of aristocratic life. In speaking about friendship, Aristotle (*Ethics* 1114c) similarly comments: “some friends drink together; some play dice together; others practice gymnastics together and hunt together or philosophize together”. Helène Whittaker’s thorough comparative analysis has shown that the general cosmological assumption

⁵⁷ Pl., *Phdr.*, 274c-d.

⁵⁸ For references see WHITTAKER 2004, 282, n. 10.

⁵⁹ MORRIS – PAPADOPOULOS 2004, 232-236.

⁶⁰ BRERI – BEN-YOSEF 2010, 417-418.

⁶¹ BRERI – BEN-YOSEF 2010, with references.

⁶² According to Herodotus, 1.94, the Lydians invented all games except dice. See KURKE 1999, 247-248, SCHÄDLER 2020. On the Greek and Roman literary construction about the invention of games, VESPA 2021.

⁶³ KURTZ – BOARDMAN 1971, 78.

⁶⁴ KURTZ 1984, 318.

⁶⁵ GARLAND 1985, 70. See also SCHÄDLER 2009 a, 175.

⁶⁶ MORRIS – PAPADOPOULOS 2004, 236.

that “life is a game” underlying the connection between board games and death must be coupled with an interpretation linking elite status to playing board games.⁶⁷ In fact, Plato observes that skill in board games requires leisure,⁶⁸ and leisure is for the wealthy, those who do not spend their time working for their living. The tragedians and other ancient authors who list Palamedes’ inventions, cite board games and dice as a painless pastime for leisure moments, a pleasant cure of idleness, along with culturally significant inventions (from three meals a day to military tactics, counting, measures and weights).⁶⁹ At the same time, board games are a serious activity, requiring skill and strategic thought, and thus they are largely reserved for adults.⁷⁰ Dice and gaming tables are also connected to the banquet: this is evident in the portrayal of the suitors playing in Homer’s *Odyssey*, in several fragmentary passages by comic poets⁷¹ and the carving of a game board on the right pilaster of the Tomb of the Reliefs in Cerveteri,⁷² otherwise presented as a fully equipped banquet room with couches, thrones and an abundance of sympotic material.

Conclusion

Board-games and dice seem to be firmly located within an elite space in the 7th and early 6th century Attica. Such a reading requires a retrospective interpretation, that is, to assume that the gaming equipment refers to the past life and status of the deceased, rather than to the prospects of a happy afterlife.⁷³ The act of placing dice and board games in burials is as much a religious as an ideological statement. In fact, whenever we are able to define the status of the owner of the tomb, he is clearly marked as a member of the elite by his inclusion in the very small percentage of the Attic population receiving special burial treatment in the form

⁶⁷ WHITTAKER 2004, 285-286.

⁶⁸ Pl., *Phdr.*, 274d. See also Pl., *Resp.*, 2, 374c. On Plato’s views about games see DASEN 2020, 100-104; also G. Bakewell in this volume.

⁶⁹ Gorg., fr. B lla.30 DK; Soph., fr. 479 Radt: [...] *κύβους καὶ πεσσούς Παλαμίδης εἶρε*; Alcidas, *Od.*, 22. See KURKE 1999, 249-251; MARISCAL 2011. Polemon (fr. 72) would claim that the board invented by Palamedes as a pastime for the Greek soldiers still existed in his native Ilion in the early 2nd c. BC. Playing dice as a pleasurable activity: Ar., *Eccl.*, 672. On Palamedes’ inventions see VESPA 2020b.

⁷⁰ GILL 2016, 105-106; DASEN 2015; SCHÄDLER 2019a, 166-167.

⁷¹ Hom., *Od.*, 1.106-122; Diphilus, fr. 74; Plut., *Mor.*, 530e; Plaut., *Asin.*, 904-906; *Mostell.*, 309.

⁷² LOVERGNE 2022, in press.

⁷³ WHITTAKER 2015, 289.

of primary cremation accompanied by placing offerings in trenches or pits (Vari, Kerameikos, Merenda). The objects are of no significant intrinsic value. It may be argued that in the first half of the 7th century, the period when the Vari table was deposited, playing board games was enough of a novelty in Greece for the inclusion of a table in a burial to underline the exclusive privileges of the elite in partaking to higher culture and leisure activities. However, most of the objects studied here date from the first two decades of the 6th century. The potters and painters of the Ragusa Group and of other workshops which produced the examples from the Kerameikos, Anavyssos and the British Museum, looked back to a tradition established by the mid-7th century gaming table and die from Vari, the die from Anavyssos and the dice without provenance in the National Museum of Athens. This is precisely the period when the polarization between the *aristoi* and the *plèthos*, the undifferentiated mass of underprivileged citizens, within Athenian society starts to wane out, with the reforms of Solon and the advent of a new wealthy class engaged in handicraft and trade. Afterwards, board games ceased to be regarded as an exclusively aristocratic domain;⁷⁴ gaming tables are now incised on steps and pavements of sanctuaries and marketplaces for everyone's use, while the work of philosophers from Protagoras to Plato and Aristotle provides ample evidence that by the 5th century a mental connection between board games and civic values was established.⁷⁵ Elsewhere, in 5th century

⁷⁴ The vases showing Ajax and Achilles playing the game of *Five Lines* (usually in the presence of Athena) on Attic black- and red-figured vases are sometimes taken (e.g. SCHÄDLER 2009a, 176) as evidence for the continuation, albeit with a different media, of the practice of furnishing Athenian tombs with gaming equipment. On the funerary connotations of the subject see further VERMEULE 1979, 81-83; MORRIS – PAPADOPOULOS 2004, 235; WHITTAKER 2004, 292. Besides the chronological gap of nearly 30-40 years between the latest painted gaming boards and dice (580-570 BC) and the earliest vases (540 BC), one might stress that most of the vases in question have been exported to Etruria, where gaming iconography starts at an early date and is independent of Attic models (CERCHIAI 2008, 92-94, fig. 2-4). Vases with the subject have also been found in sanctuaries (Acropolis, Selinus, Marzabotto). Note also the occurrence of the subject on shield bands from Olympia and Aegina (KUNZE 1950, 142 f.). The only shape with this iconography to be found in Greek tombs is the black-figured *lekythos*, but these vases date later, in the early 5th c. BC. There are many other interpretations beyond the one stressing the funerary character of the imagery (political allusions to Peisistratid Athens, the agonistic ethos of the elites, allusions to cleromancy, etc.). See BOARDMAN 1978; WOODFORD 1982; KURKE 1999, 261; SCHÄDLER 2009b; BRUNORI 2011; MARISCAL 2011; DASEN 2015; BALDONI 2017. For a curious variant, where both heroes (named in inscriptions) kneel before Athena, but without the gaming table between them, see IOZZO 2018.

⁷⁵ DASEN 2020, 103-104.

Etruria and 4th century Macedonia, gaming counters and dice continued to serve as indicators of elite and gender status, being mostly discovered in tombs of warriors and boys.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ On Etruria and Etruscanized Northern Italy, see e.g. the examples listed in NEGRONI CATACCHIO 2011, 94, n. 15 (Montepulciano near Chiusi, orientaling period); CHERICI 2001 (Todi and Perugia in Umbria) and 2007, 229 (Aléria); BUNDRICK 2015, 318 (Vulci), 328 (Bologna); GILL 2016, 106-107 (Bologna, Arnoaldi); REITERMAN 2016, 287 (Aléria), 305 (Spina); SCHÄDLER 2019a (Bologna and Spina). Most tombs belong to males, although dice are found in Late Classical/Hellenistic female tombs in the Faliscan area (MICHETTI 2006, 616-617, n. 17). For Etruscan dice in general see ARTIOLI – NOCITI – ANGELINI 2011 (citing numerous contexts, in particular from Orvieto, Tarquinia and the territory of Chiusi). For the iconography of board games in Etruria see CERCHIAI 2008. On Macedonia and Thrace, see above, n. 47. Finds exclusively from male tombs: LAMBROTHANASSI – TOULOUMTZIDOU 2016, 87.

Illustrations

Fig. 1. Protoattic gaming table from Vari. Athens, National Archaeological Museum. After CALLIPOLITIS 1963, pl. 54a.

Fig. 2. Protoattic pottery die from Vari Athens. National Archaeological Museum. After CALLIPOLITIS 1963, pl. 55c.

Fig. 3. Protoattic pottery die by the Ram-Jug Painter Athens. National Archaeological Museum, inv. 19366. After KARUZU 1973, pl. 54.1.

Fig. 4. Black-figured gaming table from the Kerameikos of Athens. Athens, Kerameikos Museum. After KURTZ – BOARDMAN 1971, fig. 12.

Fig. 5. Black-figured gaming table from Merenda. Archaeological Museum of Brauron. After *Archaeological Reports* 2010-2011, 43, fig. 65.

Fig. 6. Black-figured pottery die from Athens. Heidelberg, inv. 60/5. After GROPENGIESSER 1970, 16, pl. 141.11.

Fig. 7. Black-figured pottery die from the Acropolis of Athens. Athens, Acropolis coll. 2696. After GRAEF – LANGLOTZ 1925, 259.

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A Boeotian die in context: Gaming pieces, jewellery, seals, spindle whorls and bird bowls in a female burial of status

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To Ares and Orestes, passionate players

Abstract. The present paper presents a die in its archaeological context, which is a rich grave in the region of Boeotia. It attempts to understand with what other items this gaming piece coexisted and why, as well as who was the person who played with it during lifetime. The Boeotian die is a solid cube made of clay that presents a peculiarity in its numbering system, for the face normally bearing six dots features twenty-five instead. The date of the die in the Archaic period and the sex of the deceased can be established from its associated grave-group which comprises 48 Boeotian (mostly bird bowls) and Late Corinthian vases, minor objects, such as spindle whorls, and gaming pieces from raw natural materials (such as pebbles, shells, a terracotta animal in secondary use, etc), as well as jewellery such as rings, bracelets, necklaces, brooches, pins, spiraled tubes, seals and rosettes attached on a -now lost- head cover. The age of the dead is estimated as young from osteological analysis, which situates our die and its gaming assemblage in the

cultural context of the “*mors immatura*” in Archaic Greece. Dice among other gaming pieces are known from antiquity, yet undisturbed (and sexed) contexts of the Archaic period are rare. In the 6th century BC dice occur in sanctuaries; none is known from Boeotia, hence the significance of publishing one here in its assorted grave-group.

Boeotian die, grave group, woman

Περίληψη. Στο παρόν άρθρο παρουσιάζεται ένα ζάρι από πλούσιο Βοιωτικό ταφικό σύνολο με τα συνευρήματά του. Η συζήτηση εστιάζει στην ταύτιση των μικροαντικειμένων του τάφου ως σχετιζόμενα με παιχνίδι και στην κατανόηση της κοινωνικής ταυτότητας του νεκρού που συνοδεύεται από τέτοια σύνεργα. Το ζάρι είναι συμπαγής πήλινος κύβος με ιδιαιτερότητες στο σύστημα αρίθμησής του, εφόσον αντί έξι στιγμών στη μια πλευρά του φέρει 25. Η χρονολόγησή του στην ώριμη αρχαϊκή εποχή, καθώς και το φύλο του νεκρού (θήλυ) προσδιορίζονται από τα συνευρήματα της ταφής, τα οποία είναι 48 βοιωτικά (κυρίως «κύπελλα με πουλιά») και υστερο-κορινθιακά αγγεία, μικροαντικείμενα (αγνύθες, πετρούλες, κοχύλια, ειδώλιο σε δεύτερη χρήση, κ.α.) καθώς και κοσμήματα (δαχτυλίδια, βραχιόλια, περιδέραια, σφραγιδόλιθοι, περόνες, σπειροειδείς σωληνίσκοι και επίρραπτοι ρόδακες κεφαλοδέσμου). Η οστεολογική ανάλυση ταυτοποίησε τη νεκρή ως νεαρής ηλικίας, στοιχείο που βοηθά την ένταξη του συνόλου μας στην ιδιαίτερη πολιτισμική κατηγορία του «άωρου νεκρού», με χαρακτηριστικά κτερίσματα της αρχαϊκής εποχής. Ζάρια από ανασκαφές είναι γενικώς γνωστά, αλλά κλειστά σύνολα της αρχαϊκής εποχής στην Ελλάδα είναι ελάχιστα. Τα ζάρια απαντούν κυρίως σε ιερά κατά τον 6^ο αι. π.Χ. αλλά κανένα δεν είναι ως τώρα γνωστό από τη Βοιωτία, κάτι που καθιστά τη δημοσίευση του εδώ παρουσιαζόμενου ταφικού συνόλου πολύ σημαντική.

Βοιωτικό ζάρι, ταφικό σύνολο, γυναίκα

Riassunto. L'articolo si propone l'analisi contestuale di un dado proveniente da un ricco contesto funerario della Beozia. Obiettivo dello studio è indagare la relazione del manufatto con i materiali associati, nonché l'identità della persona sepolta con tale oggetto. Il dado beota è un cubo solido di argilla che presenta una particolarità nel suo sistema di numerazione, poiché la faccia che normalmente reca sei punti ne espone, invece, venticinque. La datazione del manufatto al periodo arcaico ed il sesso del defunto possono essere stabiliti grazie al corredo associato che comprende 48 vasi locali (principalmente coppe con decorazione ad uccelli) e di produzione tardo-corinzia, piccoli oggetti come fuseruole e altri strumenti di gioco ottenuti da materie prime naturali (ciottoli, conchiglie, un animale di terracotta di reimpiego, ecc.), nonché gioielli come anelli, braccialetti, collane, gemme, fibule, ornamenti tubulari a spirale, sigilli e rosette fissate in origine ad un copricapo non più conservato. L'analisi osteologica attesta la giovane età del defunto,

che permette di associare il dado e gli altri strumenti lusori al fenomeno culturale della *mors immatura* nella Grecia arcaica. I dadi, come altri strumenti di gioco, sono noti dall'antichità, ma i contesti indisturbati del periodo arcaico (e di cui si possa determinare il sesso di appartenenza) sono rari. Nel VI sec. a.C. i dadi sono presenti nei santuari; nessun esemplare era sinora noto dalla Beozia; da qui l'importanza di pubblicarne uno in questa sede in relazione al suo contesto funerario di rinvenimento.

Dado, Beozia, corredo funerario, donna

Introduction

This paper presents a peculiar die in its archaeological context, which is a rich grave in the region of Akraiphia in Boeotia and discusses further the identity of the person who supposedly played with it in lifetime.¹ The date of the die in the Archaic period is established from its associated grave-group which comprises at least 48 vases, items of metal, glass and faience jewellery, as well as minor objects, such as a selection of spindle whorls.² Although many dice and gaming pieces are known from antiquity, undisturbed contexts of the Archaic period are rare, hence the significance of this discovery and its publication in context.

1. An unusual die

The die (**no. G1**) is a solid cube (ca 3.5 x 3.5 cm; 78.60 gr) made of brown clay (Figs 1-2; 10). Its edges and corners are worn and rounded due to the object's use-life and possibly also to the conditions in the pit grave. Its dots are shallow depressions smeared with a white substance that was overpainted with black, as seen on the central dot of the face bearing 5. The die presents a peculiar numbering system because one face features 25 dots instead of the expected 6 dots; of these some originally close to the side of the cube are abraded. Two shallow circles on the second row from left and at the upper and lower end of the column featuring 5 dots are random depressions.³

The values with respect to one another on the cube's six faces are placed as follows: 3 and 4, 2 and 5, 1 and 25 are featured at opposite sides. If there were 6 instead of 25 dots opposite 1, the way of placing the values on this die would have conformed to the "Sevens" configuration, which follows the rule that "opposite sides of a die add up to 7".⁴ This combination is

¹ Thanks to Barbara Carè, Véronique Dasen and Ulrich Schädler for the invitation to the conference and useful comments; to Olia Peperaki for the excellent field work and drawings; to Frank Rumscheid, Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier and Panagiotis Hatzidakis for information on the Bonn and the Samian dice; to David S. Reese for the identification of the shells; to Annareta Touloumtzidou, Barbara Carè and Véronique Dasen for bibliographic references; to the Ephorate of Boeotia, Alexandra Harami and Ioanna Moraitou for amenities and the work of conservation.

They are thought to have been invented in India, from where they were distributed to Mesopotamian cultures. Their varying contexts and forms do not always allow for their secure association with specific games: DE VOOGT *et alii* 2015.

² A full publication of the vases and minor objects is impending.

³ Possibly a mistake or trial by the die striker, or even damage due to the die's mediocre state of preservation.

⁴ On die configuration and dot pattern see DE VOOGT *et alii* 2015, 152-154; see further DE VOOGT – EERKENS 2018.



Figs. 1-2

the commonest in antiquity, especially from the post-Archaic era onwards, and the one adopted also today. Regarding dot patterns, those forming the numbers 1, 4 and 5 are arranged in the standard way. The dots for 2 are placed in a straight line, while those for 3 form a triangle, arrangements known in antiquity but occurring less frequently. Number 25 is arranged with 5 lines of 5 dots each, which are not regularly spaced among themselves. The only parallel I know of a die with 25 dots instead of 6 is an ivory one in the Kunstmuseum Bonn, of unknown provenance and date (Fig. 3).⁵ The arrangement of values on it differs from our die, as at opposite faces are placed 3 and 1, as also 4 and 2. Value 5 features opposite 25.

Such dice are exceptional. Those with repeating numbers at the exclusion of others have been called “false dice”, which, however, is not our case since the Boeotian die conforms to the dominant “Sevens” form, except for the side bearing 25 dots.⁶ In her study of Hellenistic gaming sets, Despina Ignatiadou notes that dice configuring more than 6 dots occur usually as

⁵ Akademisches Kunstmuseum – Antikensammlung der Universität Bonn, Inv. B 352. Brought to my attention by U. Schädler. It measures 1.4 x 1.4 cm and bears spots of 2 mm in diameter with a central dot. The spots on the side of 25 are 1.5 mm in diameter.

⁶ For “false dice” see DE VOOGT *et alii* 2015, 152. It follows that our die’s manufacturer knew the norms governing die configuration through cultural transmission but modified the “Sevens” configuration only once, when he stroke 25 dots.



Fig. 3

singletons rather than as part of a gaming set. She offers the hypothesis that they are more appropriate for games of chance rather than board games which require very set rules and canonical dice.⁷ At least three untypical dice are known from Greece: one is from Archaic Sindos with only 8 x 7 or 7 x 6 dots on the golden sheet coating its wooden core; two are from classical Corinth with 9 dots instead of 6 and with uncanonical configuration.⁸ Yet, these idiosyncratic examples can hardly be compared to the Boeotian die, which diverges from the norm only in its featuring 25 instead of 6 dots, but is otherwise canonical. Thus, our singleton should not be considered *a priori* alien to a gaming set.

2. The Boeotian die in its archaeological context: An assemblage with pebbles, shells and a broken figurine⁹

The die was found in a fossa pit which is the typical type of grave in Archaic Boeotian cemeteries (Figs 4-6).¹⁰ On its cover slabs 26 Boeotian bird bowls were placed in a reversed position. This deposition pattern is known also in other instances, and tombs of this kind are often richly furnished with a multitude of objects in various materials.¹¹ The custom of overturning vases at the closing of a funeral may be interpreted as a deliberate cancellation of their use in order to mark emphatically a person's demise. The die in question was found inside the pit and at the area of

⁷ IGNATIADOU 2013, 224. See also IGNATIADOU 2019.

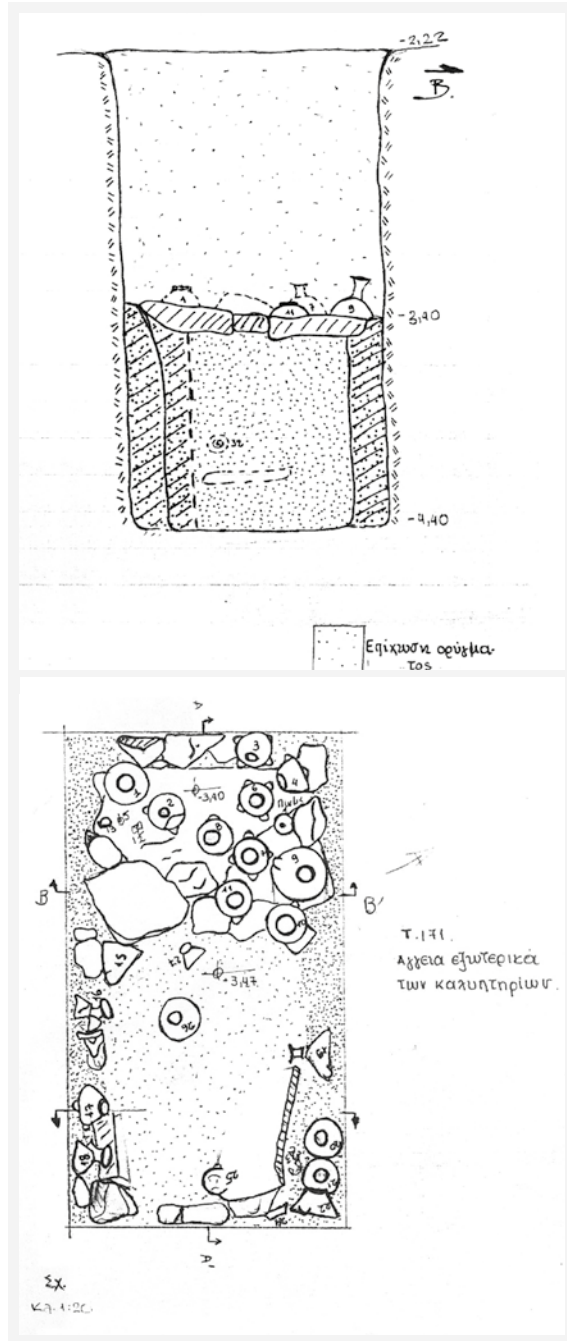
⁸ Sindos: DESPOINI 2016, 85-86 (tomb of adolescent boy). Corinth: DAVIDSON 1952, 221, nos. 1737 and 1738, pl. 100. See further ALEVIZOU 2020.

⁹ For a catalogue of finds see Appendix 3.

¹⁰ AD 51, B1 (1996), 273-274. Dimensions: 2 / 2.5 x 0.80 / 1.20 m. Height: 1.20 m (fossa) and 1 m (pit). Orientation: E-W, head at the East. The dead lay in a pit opened at the bottom of the shaft; the pit was covered with four roughly hewn slabs preserved in situ only at its western part. After placing reversed vases on the slabs covering the pit, the shaft was filled with earth up to the ground surface. The underlying pit must have remained unfilled, as suggested by the slabs that collapsed in it (eastern part) due to the weight of the shaft's fill.

¹¹ Note that such tombs are infrequent. ANDREIOMENOU 2015, esp. 61 notes that only 28 in a total of 663 Akraiphian tombs of all periods (Geometric to Hellenistic) comprised bird bowls. This rather small number may suggest distinctions in the treatment of the dead according to their age-class or status.

the dead's feet, where ten other vases were densely packed together, as well as a small bronze knife. The vases were the Boeotian miniature pedestalled krater no. 34 which is decorated with confronted birds in silhouette (Fig. 7a, b), the Corinthian pyxides nos. 31, 33, 35, 37 and alabastron no. 39, the Boeotian stam-noid no. 32, the kotyliske no. 36 and the black-glazed skyphos no. 38. This drinking vase was found filled with small objects to be discussed right below (Fig. 9). A pyxis lid (no. 48) lying smashed on top of it may have covered it, but this is uncertain as it is of smaller diameter. The skyphos was found upright a few centimetres underneath the die and contained 11 shells (No. G4), four semi-spherical pebbles of light and dark colour (no. G5), a cylindrical one with "veins" (no. G6), and a miniature figurine of a caprine (no. G7) (Figs 9a, b). The animal was probably once yoked to a cart, as suggested by the strip of clay on its back and belly which is broken at its inner side, where it would have joined a second quadruped. One of the shells from within the skyphos has an almost rectangular shape (due to natural causes) except for the side of the shell's apex (*umbo*). The two pairs of light and dark pebbles (Fig. 10, middle and bottom) may have been originally matched with another that bears an engraved circle



Figs. 4-5

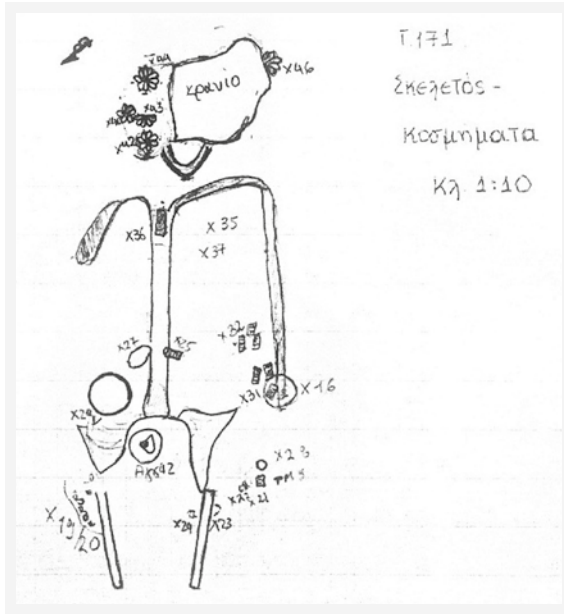


Fig. 6

(no. **G3**) (Fig. 10, top left) but which was found outside the skyphos.

The upright drinking vase containing selected pebbles and shells may suggest that at least some of them served as gaming pieces, a view corroborated by the die found at the immediate vicinity above the pot. Stone gaming counters are mentioned in the literary sources;¹² they are also attested in Etruscan necropoleis of the Archaic and Classical period and occur further in sets of the Hellenistic period together with dice in Macedonia.¹³ The engraved pebble no. **G3** is rare, attesting to usage and modification of ready-made material taken from

nature. Has it been engraved in order to serve as a special piece of a board game? Was its engraved circle meant to imitate the iris of an eye in order to create an “intelligent” counter that could “see” its way through on the gaming board?¹⁴ Or was it meant to recall an inlaid element, as in some glass objects? The shells are also interesting, for they could be used as toys and gaming pieces according to the testimonia and to archaeological evidence from graves.¹⁵ The heavier shells, in particular, can easily serve as counters because they are sturdy like pebbles, while having an elegant and “exotic” appearance. It is uncertain whether the partly broken miniature animal figurine also served as counter; it should be noted that it became unable to stand upright on its own after it broke from its terracotta group.¹⁶ We may then

¹² *Alk.* Frg. 82.

¹³ For pebbles in Macedonian sets see IGNATIADOU 2013, 212 (18 items); 215 (15 items); 216 (6 items); 218 (1 item); 219 (13 items); 227. See also IGNATIADOU 2019. For Etruscan sets see *ibid.* 227-228; LAMBROTHANASSI – TOULUMTZIDOU 2016, 85-86.

¹⁴ For eyes on objects in antiquity see STEINHART 1995.

¹⁵ For shells in Athenian (child) burials see STROSZECK 2012; for Macedonian graves where they are found as part of gaming sets see IGNATIADOU 2013, 212 (17 items); 215 (2 worked items); 219 (11 items). For the symbolism of shells in the South Italian funerary record see CARÈ 2018.

¹⁶ For miniature animals as counters in the Prehistoric era see L. Phialon and V. Pliatsika in this volume.

suggest that die, pebbles, shells, and perhaps also a clay animal in secondary use served as playthings because they were unearthed together. Although only part of the assemblage was found within the grave's skyphos while the rest was scattered around it, it is more than possible that all the objects were originally placed together in the pot and were later disturbed due to taphonomic conditions. The lakeside cemetery of Akraiphia suffered regular inundations. Intrusive water, in addition to the weight of the shaft's fill, could cause damage or displacement of cover slabs and objects in the burial pit.

Regarding the skyphos no. 38 that was used as storage container for the gaming pieces, it is notable that a similar vessel containing shells, some of which were processed, is further known from Magna Graecia. Although such shells could be variously explained, it cannot be excluded that they were toys or counters.¹⁷ Two vase paintings by the Plousios Painter depicting a pair of men engaged in a board game show a large skyphos or skyphoid krater below the gaming table.¹⁸ On the basis of the above-mentioned evidence we may wonder whether the utilitarian vessel shown in the images could have served as storage receptacle for the men's gaming set.

Although cubic dice and gaming tables are known from Archaic Attica since the mid-7th and with a peak in the 6th century BC,¹⁹ actual gaming sets with counters and dice are not known from the Greek mainland before the mid-4th century BC, the first recorded examples being those unearthed in graves at Pieria in Macedonia.²⁰ Yet, in the Archaic era gaming assemblages may have been offered to the dead more frequently than it has been possible to detect archaeologically. In particular, pebble-counters originally

¹⁷ BÉRARD 2017, 245-248 (child grave, Megara Hyblaea; Archaic). For shells found in drinking vessels see further CARÈ 2018, 148-149.

¹⁸ See the late-archaic pelike New York, MMA 68.27 and another (probably now in Jerusalem), Borowski collection (*BAPD* 7599 and 11685 respectively). The corpus of the Plousios Painter (so named by Bothmer; his attribution also of a third vase [Vatican City, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco Vaticano 413; *BAPD* 31764] was not unanimously accepted) comprises two vases depicting the same scene of a game. The current interpretation as workmen playing in the marketplace seems questionable to me. The men are citizens as suggested by their staffs, while the presence of musical instruments signals festivity and komos as noted by CERCHIAI 2008, 98. In vase-imagery the utilitarian vessel under the table is associated with the activity taking place on it and serves in collecting material falling from it. In scenes of shoe-making it collects discarded pieces of leather (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 563; *BAPD* 302990), while in those of sacrifice the victim's blood (for the *sphageion* see, e.g., GEBAUER 2002, 304-305, no. Z 8, fig. 170; 307-309, no. Z 10, fig. 172; 314-315, no. Z 20, fig. 184; 321, no. Z 28, fig. 190; 322, no. Zv 31, fig. 192).

¹⁹ For early Attic dice from graves see IGNATIADOU 2013, 224 and D. Paleothodoros in this volume.

²⁰ LAMBROTHANASSI – TOULOUMTZIDOU 2016, 84 with earlier bibliography.



Figs. 7-8



Figs. 9-10

placed in containers made of perishable materials, rather than pots, can pass unnoticed as they look like any random stone in a tomb's fill.²¹

Regarding affiliation of the Boeotian die with examples from other areas, it may be compared to large, solid clay dice from the sanctuary of Hera at Samos and from the Corycian cave at Phocis.²² Comparison with the earliest Attic dice shows that ours is equally large but cruder than those beautiful pieces that bear skilful decoration in black-figure.²³ Artfully decorated dice would not have been inappropriate in games of skill such as board games, but their rarity suggests that they may have served also as votives. Although their early use in Attica is well documented, the lack of precise findspots does not shed any light on their function. The Archaic die from Boeotia attests to early use also in this region, where no other examples are currently known, while its archaeological context allows some thoughts about dice in gaming and votive practices.

3. Which game could have been played with an uncanonical die?

The total of five pebbles in the grave recalls the game of *pentalitha* or Five Stones described by Pollux as the favourite game of girls, *parthenoi*.²⁴ Five astragals, nuts or pebbles were thrown up into the air and then attempted to be caught while falling on the back of the hand. However, the occurrence of the die cannot exclude the possibility that our pebbles and shells may have served as gaming counters related to one another and to the cube.²⁵ The best-known ancient game played with counters and one or two dice is *pente*

²¹ For gaming pieces from later times from the Kabirion see BRAUN – HAEVERNICK 1981, 114, pl. 34: 32-37.

²² The Samian die (Vathy Museum, inv. T 2585; dimensions: 4,9 x 3,8 x 4,5 cm) was found in clean-up dumps at the area of the altars preceding the one erected by Rhoikos. The die's number arrangement does not conform to the "Sevens" configuration (1 and 2, 3 and 4, 5 and 6 features at opposite sides). According to W.-D. Niemeier, the die is made locally, and its associated pottery provides a date to ca. 590-570 BC for it. For Phocian dice see JACQUEMIN 1984, 170-171, nos. 16-17. For dice from the stoa of the temple at Skala, Kephallenia see VIKATOU – PAPAFLORATOU 2015, 18.

²³ See the die Athens, N.M. 19366 (KARUSU 1973, 56; mid-7th c. BC; SCHÄDLER 1999, 39 and fig. p. 41) which depicts a male head on one face, a horse protome on another and decorative designs on the rest. Although identified with Palamedes, the head may in fact be the abbreviated figure of an aristocratic male whose horse appears on another face. If this die was functional and not produced for a strictly votive use, the shot with the head up may have been the winning one. Another decorated die features black-figure birds (first third of the 6th c. BC; Vlastos collection, from Sounion). For Archaic Attic dice see further D. Paleothodoros in this volume.

²⁴ Poll., *Onom.*, 9.126-127 = COSTANZA 2019, 316-317.

²⁵ Note that no astragals were found in our grave group which would have perhaps suggested accumulation of random playthings. Deposition patterns of knucklebones at the necropolis of Akraiphia are uncharted. It seems that they occur less frequently in the Archaic than in later periods.

grammai, which was popular from the late 7th to the 3rd century BC and was regarded as of noble character.²⁶ Two players move five counters each across a board of wood, stone, or other material, with five parallel lines engraved or drawn on it; a central line is called sacred and the winner is the one who manages to place his pieces on this line first. No board was found in the Boeotian tomb, but the large size of the die and its worn edges may suggest that it could have been thrown directly onto the ground, where a board with lines could have been temporarily sketched.²⁷

Enlarged versions of *pente grammai* existed too, where the gaming board could sport 11 lines instead of five. In such cases the number of counters corresponded to the number of lines, each player having as many counters as lines on the board.²⁸ Is it possible that a version of *pente grammai* could be also played with a die bearing 25 dots instead of just six? Could it be that the number 25, integral multiple of five, with its dots arranged in five lines, was associated with this particular game? One logically supposes that the privileged or lucky throw would be the one featuring the 25 dots. The example in Bonn shows that our die is not an absolute *unicum*. Since it is thought that singletons were used in divinatory practices, the existence of two similar, though not identical examples, strengthens the possibility that they were used in a game rather than in divination, although dice, could, of course, have several different functions.

The game of *pente grammai* is best known through a series of terracotta gaming tables and the description by Pollux. It was regarded as a game requiring strategic skill and chance and able to combine entertainment with education. A series of vase-paintings most of which depict Homeric heroes playing an unspecified board game at an interval of the Trojan war, attest to the association of such imagery with figures of status.²⁹ At least one vase bearing a board game scene was imported to Halai, a town at the border of Lokris with Boeotia (Fig. 11a-c).³⁰

²⁶ SCHÄDLER 2009b; IGNATIADOU 2013, 221-223; WIDURA 2015, 111-115; KIDD 2017.

²⁷ An irregular stone (30 x 50 cm) resembling a broken cover slab was found close to the gaming set as seen on the excavation drawings and photographs. It is rather impossible that it could have been a gaming board; no lines were discerned on it during the dig.

²⁸ SCHÄDLER 2009b, 181.

²⁹ WOODFORD 1982; CERCHIAI 2008; SCHÄDLER 2009a; DASEN 2015; CASTOLDI 2015; WIDURA 2015, 112-115. Some scenes in the series show citizens.

³⁰ Thebes Museum 46381, by the Emporion Painter: see GOLDMAN – JONES 1942, pl. 2, iii, 4; *ABV* 586, 12 (*BAPD* 331212). It is of interest that the heroes are flanked at either side by an archer. More unpublished examples exist from Boeotia and Lokris. See SELEKOU 2014, 446, no. K 3512.



Fig. 11

4. Gaming pieces for her grave: A young woman of status and the “*mors immatura*” in Archaic Boeotia

Who is buried with counters and dice in antiquity and why? Although evidence from sexed graves is limited, some observations can be offered. Burials comprising gaming sets in Hellenistic Macedonia are commonly associated with men and boys.³¹ Furthermore, the attribution of the invention of playing with dice and counters to the hero Palamedes³² and the association of board games to the elite, as attested also from the iconography of Ajax and Achilles at play, has led to the conclusion that such games carried connotations of prominent social status and aristocratic ideals. With this in mind, let us look at the occupant of our grave and ask who could have been buried with a gaming assemblage in Archaic Boeotia, a confederacy with aristocratic regimes that lasted until the 4th century BC.

The grave’s skeleton was poorly preserved. Osteological analysis by Efthymia Nikita showed that the bones belonged to a young adult of undetermined sex.³³ Yet, several highly gender specific objects help ascertain

³¹ LAMBROTHANASSI – TOULOUMTZIDOU 2016, esp. 87. For board games and aristocratic military prowess in Hellenistic Thrace. See further NANKOV 2013.

³² See WOODFORD – KRAUSKOPF 1994; VESPA 2021.

³³ See Appendix 2.



Figs. 12-13

the sex of the dead.³⁴ On or around the skeleton were found many bronze, faience and glass jewellery items (Figs. 12-15). The eight bronze rosettes (no. **J6**) lying around the skull must have been attached on a veil once covering the head. On the chest were also a pinhead (no. **J7b**), at least six smashed fibulae (no. **J5**) and blue faience disc-beads from a necklace (no. **J8a**). Several bronze spiral tubes were around the head, on the chest and on the fingerbones (no. **J4**). One bracelet (nos. **J1a, b**) was in each arm, while four rings (no. **J3**), many glass beads from a second necklace (no. **J8b**), two disc-shaped faience seals (nos. **J9a, b**) depicting an ibex or gazelle (Fig. 15)³⁵ and two small spindle whorls for spinning very fine yarn (nos. SW3; SW4) were on the left-hand (Fig. 16). In the fingers of the right hand were three rings, among which a silver one (no. **J2**). A second pair of larger and heavier spindle whorls (nos. SW1, SW2) were deposited close to the gaming assemblage at the area around the feet. Thus, the jewellery and the ornate head cover, as well as the spindle whorls suggest that the dead was a young woman. She was buried fully adorned and veiled as a bride, and with insignia highlighting a gender ideal, that of the industrious female, as indicated by her spinning equipment. The existence of spindle whorls

³⁴ For a catalogue of objects see Appendix 3.

³⁵ The seals, rare items in Akraiphia, must have been attached to rings.



Fig. 14

for fine yard suggests that the dead woman was not only able to produce but also to wear luxurious garments. As is well-known, poets and painters since Homer repeatedly praised in word and image the spinning woman as skilful and seductive. Her faience seals functioned as symbols of status as well as amulets that granted her protection from the evils believed to haunt individuals transitioning liminal states, such as bridehood and pregnancy.³⁶ We conclude, then, that in a female burial of status a gaming assemblage had apparently also a place and a role to play.³⁷

Let us note further that dice were associated with women in many interesting ways also in non-funerary contexts. Telling evidence comes from sanctuaries of goddesses where worshippers dedicated their cubes, as e.g., the Corycian cave at Phocis sacred to the Nymphs (and Pan) and the Attic sanctuary of Artemis at Brauron, which was closely associated with female maturation and childbirth.³⁸ Yet, the most impressive evidence of dice

³⁶ For faience seals and their association with females of status in early Attica see LANGDON 2005, 9-10. For the specific association of amulets and pregnancy see Plut., *De Is. et Os.*, 65.

³⁷ In the Greek mainland gaming sets are associated with men. In Etruria, a mirror of the 3rd c. BC depicts a couple playing a board game, with the woman cast as a half-naked, eroticized bride: SCHÄDLER 2009b, 179, fig. 4. In the western Greek necropolis of Lokroi Epizefyrion, astragals are interpreted as reference to an elite status in both female and male deceased (CARÈ 2017, 188, n. 85).

³⁸ Delphi, Corycian cave: JACQUEMIN 1984, 170-171. Brauron: DAUX 1960, 669, fig. 12.



Figs. 15-16

dedicated to goddesses comes from the Spartan sanctuary of Artemis Orthia. The metal votive dice found there date to the late 7th century BC, have a spindle-like form and bear inscriptions mentioning that they are gifts not only to Artemis, but also to Eileithyia, protector of labour and childbirth.³⁹ The rare find of two seals as part of our Boeotian woman's funerary ornamentation may further point to her demise at a critical moment of female life, i.e. during bridehood or pregnancy.

5. Date

The date of our die depends on the Boeotian and Late Corinthian ceramics (Figs. 17-18) and the jewellery.⁴⁰ The Boeotian bird bowls found inverted on the tomb's slabs (nos. 1-11; 14-23; 25-27; 29-30) belong to a well-known local class of vases called cups, though they rather resemble pedestalled bowls (Fig. 17 a-c).⁴¹ Artisans of the bird-bowls Class painted also oinochoai, kantharoi, skyphoi, and figurines. The bird bowls show

³⁹ KILIAN 1978, 221-222 notes that these inscribed dice served as offerings, not oracular objects in this sanctuary. Although men also visited sanctuaries of goddesses, women must have figured prominently in such cult places.

⁴⁰ The forthcoming publication of the pottery will help define more narrowly our grave-group's date.

⁴¹ For the term "bird bowls" see BOARDMAN 1998, 109. SIMON 1972, 213 thinks these were lekanai or louteria for use in wedding rituals.



Fig. 17 a-c

outline-drawn flying birds painted so as to appear inverted when the vessel stands on its foot, but most feature plain floral and linear designs. Their fragile polychromy creates a decorative effect but further suggests that they may have been non-functional. Such vases are known from the necropoleis at Rhitsona and Akraiphia where a local workshop has been hypothesized.⁴² Tombs containing patterned and figured bird bowls are a minority in the cemeteries. Further, such bowls featuring birds are usually outnumbered by the patterned examples within their grave group.⁴³ The tombs furnished with bird bowls were fossa pits for adults of unknown sex and age or child enchytrisms. Despite various efforts to form a typology, bird bowls are not easy to classify and their date has been the object of debate.⁴⁴ Based on excavated material Percy N. Ure dated the Rhitsona series from the second quarter of the 6th century BC down to the end of the century (580/560 to 500/480 BC). A date in the second third of the 6th century BC, possibly around the mid-6th century BC for our tomb-group is supported by all its contents. Notable is the miniature pedestalled krater

⁴² URE 1927, 12-19 (200 bird bowls from a few Rhitsona graves); ANDREIOMENOU 2015, 65-122 (from Akraiphia). For the rarity of graves with bird bowls see n. 11 above.

⁴³ In our grave there were seven bird bowls depicting birds among 19 bowls of the same class with patterned decoration.

⁴⁴ For bibliography see KATHARIOU 2009, text to pl. 42; ANDREIOMENOU 2015.

no. 34 that features silhouetted birds (swans) (Fig. 7a-b). It resembles a nuptial lebes and its style of drawing recalls Ure's Geometricizing Group, a Boeotian class of small silhouette vases that spans the second and third quarter of the 6th century BC.⁴⁵

Conclusion

The evidence from the Boeotian tomb T.171 (middle decades of the 6th century BC) suggests that the owner of our unusual die was a young woman also possessing a gaming assemblage which her family thought significant to bury her with. As gaming pieces were used objects from nature (pebbles and shells) and maybe also an artifact in secondary use (miniature terracotta animal). That objects of

such divergent nature could be recycled to serve as counters is indicative of the easiness in mounting gaming assemblages in Archaic Greece, and Boeotia in particular. It further shows the fondness of 6th century BC Boeotians for the exotic-looking shells of their lake homeland. Such usage is in sharp contrast to the homogeneous appearance of gaming sets in later eras, when coloured glass counters and bone dice featuring standard values are the norm. The storage of the gaming pieces in a drinking vase highlights further the multiple uses to which vessels could be put, serving also as toy containers.

A forceful imagery was created at the funeral of the dead woman who occupied the grave T.171: jewellery ornamented her veiled body, spindle whorls for fine yard referred visually to a cherished female role and amuletic seals highlighted her status while soothing the anxieties surrounding



Fig. 18

⁴⁵ URE 1929; this Class does not comprise pedestalled krateriskoi such as ours. For a similar, perhaps earlier example, see KÄSTNER-VON BRÜCK 1980, 203, fig. 11; 208. For a similar shape cf. CVA Berlin 4, pl. 187, 5-6. The decorative motif recalls a more skillful one on a miniature skyphos from Akraiphia: ANDREIOMENOU 2015, 292, pl. 189, 67.9.

maturation and the risks of pregnancy. All these objects helped construe a bodily image – and self-identity – that was imbued with symbolisms and wished-for ideals associated with female gender and status. The only iconographic motifs featured on the few objects that bore figural decoration were birds and caprines.⁴⁶ The evidence from a funerary “mise en scène” that highlights gender ideals complements the anthropological data that point to a prematurely deceased young woman. She was treated with burial vocabulary signalling the elite *aoros* in Archaic Boeotia, part of which was a gaming assemblage that marked her and by extension her family’s elevated status.

In describing his vision of a happy afterlife several decades later, the Boeotian poet Pindar is quoted as having written that, “some enjoy horses and wrestling, others board games, and yet others the music of the lyre”.⁴⁷ This source should not lead to the conclusion that board games had a funerary significance as has been often argued.⁴⁸ On the contrary, gaming assemblages could occasionally escort the dead in order to characterize him/her as noble, intelligent and blissful while further highlighting the fragility of the human condition which all too often resembles the throw of a die.

Appendix 1. Flying upside down on the bird bowls:

A Boeotian enigma

An odd feature of bird bowls, as well as occasionally of this Class’s skyphoi and kantharoi, is that the flying birds appear inverted when the vessel stands upright. In order to see the birds properly one has to invert the vessel, which recalls the funerary ritual of placing them upside-down on the tomb’s cover slabs (Figs. 4-5 and 19). The reason for the odd rendering of the birds on the bowls has been variously explained, but without consideration of their placement in the grave. Some scholars regarded upside-down birds as a regional peculiarity of early Boeotian vase-painting, while others attributed it to technical reasons during manufacture, namely painting the bowl inverted for easier handling.⁴⁹ Although it is easier to

⁴⁶ For the birds see miniature krater no. 34, Late Corinthian kotyle no. 12 and pyxis no. 33, as well as the bird bowls (Figs. 7, 18 and 19). The caprines were featured on the seals nos. J9a, b (Fig. 15) and on the small terracotta animal G7 (Fig. 9).

⁴⁷ [Plut.], *Mor., Cons. ad Apoll.*, 120C.

⁴⁸ WHITTAKER 2004.

⁴⁹ CVA Kiel 1 (1988) text to pl. 1, 1-2 (B. FREYER-SCHAUENBURG) with earlier bibliography.

decorate stemmed bowls by holding them inverted, this is not the case with kantharoi and skyphoi, which occasionally also display upside-down birds, even though they must have been held upright at the moment of decoration.⁵⁰ The answer to the riddle may be that the bird bowls (and occasionally also kantharoi and skyphoi in this class) were meant to be seen inverted, as offerings. Other shapes, such as, e.g., the oinochoai depict the birds in the expected way because they were meant to be deposited upright.⁵¹ Thus, it seems that bird bowls were of non-functional character, as suggested further by



Fig. 19

their technical features (lack of slip and glaze; friable fabric; polychromy) as well as by a votive dipinto inscription on one example.⁵² In fact, most come from necropoleis, while the few examples from sanctuaries bear patterned decoration (Ptoion, cave of Leibethrian Nymphs).⁵³ The example of our grave further suggests that bird-bowls were placed inverted on the cover slabs as part of a conspicuous funerary ritual at the closing of the pit.

Birds depicted right-side-up appear occasionally also on generic enthroned figurines that were made in the bird-bowls workshops. These figurines, wearing polos and necklaces with pending pomegranates were originally interpreted as goddesses, but may stand for mortal enthroned brides.⁵⁴ Flying birds are also depicted on terracotta poloi by the same workshops, a significant fact, as the polos is characteristic headgear of

⁵⁰ Skyphoi with birds drawn upside down: ANDREIOMENOU 2105, pl. 97, 19.1; pl. 109, 20.1; pl. 116, 23.1; pl. 195, 7; pl. 199, 4; pl. 206, 37-38. Kantharos and skyphos with bird drawn upright: pl. 72, 15,21; pl. 210, 3.

⁵¹ See e.g. ANDREIOMENOU 2015, pl. 87, 18.1; pl. 227.

⁵² MAFFRE 1975, 415-425, fig. 2.

⁵³ ZAMPITI 2012, 182-185, esp. n. 834; see also 245 for a terracotta polos associated with the workshops that produced bird bowls.

⁵⁴ For examples see HAMDORF 2014, 60, no. C 94 (575-550 BC); SIMON 1972, 211, fig. 7. For seated figurines as mortals see HUYSECOM-HAXHI – MULLER 2015.

bridal figures in Boeotian art. One such example depicting a file of polos-wearing women has been rightly connected to the nymphs and marriage in a far-sighted article by Erika Simon.⁵⁵ Acting as visual indexes, the birds fly towards either side of the central woman, who is thus best understood as the bride among her peers, one of whom offers her a pomegranate. Simon further argued that the birds are cravens, which were considered models of happy conjugality in antiquity.

In view of the above, one wonders whether the bird bowls were produced in order to feature inverted especially on the graves of prematurely deceased females. Most bird bowls bear patterned decoration, but the few vases with birds recall the ritual bridal *poloi* and the matronal figurines decorated with similar motifs. One needs more examples to substantiate this hypothesis, but it seems no coincidence that in the case of grave T.171 bird bowls accompany a female dead provided also with jewellery and spindle whorls, insignia of the respectful citizen bride and matron. The die and assorted gaming material placed at her feet adds one more fascinating facet to the burial vocabulary of the *mors immatura* in early Greece.⁵⁶

Appendix 2. Osteological analysis by Efthymia Nikita

The grave's skeleton was in a poor state of preservation. The skull preserved part of the mandibular corpus, small segments of the parietals and the right mastoid process; the spine preserved parts of 2 cervical, 9 thoracic and 5 lumbar neural arches; the shoulder girdle consisted of small scapular and clavicular segments; the long bones of the upper and lower limbs preserved small diaphyseal segments, while the pelvic girdle consisted of small ischial and iliac segments. Most mandibular teeth were present but only the roots were preserved inside the alveoli while the crowns had broken off.

The poor preservation of the skeleton rendered the assessment of sex inconclusive. The pelvis, which is the most accurate anatomical area for skeletal sex assessment, was too partially preserved and lacked all sexually dimorphic anatomical structures. Similarly, the long bones were too fragmented to allow metric sex estimation, while the only cranial anatomical

⁵⁵ SIMON 1972 (the proposed connections with the Daidala festival may be less obvious).

⁵⁶ Several examples in ANDREIOMENOU 2015 document the combination of bird bowls, jewellery and items used by females in the necropolis of Akraiphia.

structure useful in sex assessment was the mastoid process, which is not a particularly reliable sex marker.

The state of the skeleton rendered age estimation also rather problematic. None of the traditional ageing methods (e.g. methods based on the morphology of the pubic symphysis, iliac auricular surface, sternal rib end, cranial suture closure) could be used. Thus, age was tentatively assessed as ‘young adult’ (approximately 18-35 years) based on the lack of ante-mortem tooth loss among mandibular teeth.

Appendix 3. Catalogue of Finds

A. Catalogue of Vases

On the cover slabs: 30 vases (nos. **1-30**),⁵⁷ of which 26 are Boeotian bird bowls; three or four Late Corinthian vases (kotyle no. **12**, aryballoi nos. **13** and possibly **28**, pyxis no. **24**) (Figs 7-8, 17-19).⁵⁸ Of the bird bowls 21 are stemmed and five stemless; 19 bear patterned decoration and seven, all stemmed, birds.⁵⁹ The tallest bird bowls are ca. 19-20 cm high and bear birds. Most vases are mended from fragments; some are partly preserved.

1. Inv. 52612. Bird bowl (bird-tail handle). H. 9 cm⁶⁰.
2. Inv. 52602. Stemmed bird bowl. H. 13.5 cm.
3. Inv. 52606. Stemmed bird bowl. H. pres. 8.5 cm.
4. Inv. 52595. Stemmed bird bowl. H. 12.5 cm.
5. Inv. 52610. Stemmed bird bowl. H. pres. 14 cm.
6. Inv. 52583. Stemmed bird bowl. H. 12.5 cm.
7. Inv. 52585. Stemmed bird bowl; birds. H. 16.6 cm.
8. Inv. 52608 + 52598. Stemmed bird bowl. H. pres. 13.2 cm.
9. Inv. 52582. Stemmed bird bowl; birds. H. 19 cm.
10. Inv. 52607. Stemmed bird bowl; birds. Broken. Diam. 31 cm.
11. Inv. 52577. Bird bowl (bird-tail handle). H. 8 cm.
12. Inv. 52596. Corinthian black-figure kotyle; birds and sirens. H. 6.5 cm. Diam. base 5.4 cm.

⁵⁷ The detailed study of the grave's pottery will appear in a forthcoming publication.

⁵⁸ Due to the collapse of some slabs into the pit it is not entirely certain that the second aryballois was an exterior offering.

⁵⁹ The motifs are palmettes, cross-hatched triangles alternating with upright spirals, herring-bone triangles etc.

⁶⁰ For the design cf. URE 1927, pl. IV, 126.1 – 126.2, (540-30 BC); ANDREIOMENOU 2015, pl. 63, 15.1 (ca. 550 BC).

13. Inv. 52584. Corinthian aryballos; quatrefoil. H. 5 cm.
14. Inv. 52578. Bird bowl (bird-tail handle). H. 7.5 cm.
15. Inv. 52605. Stemmed bird bowl; birds. Broken.
16. Inv. 52588. Stemmed bird bowl. H. pres. 8.5 cm.
17. Inv. 52574. Stemmed bird bowl. H. 13 cm.
18. Inv. 52591. Stemmed bird bowl. H. 18.3 cm.
19. Inv. 52594. Stemmed bird bowl. H. 14.5 cm.
20. Inv. 52576. Stemmed bird bowl. H. 12.9 cm.
21. Inv. 52575. Stemmed bird bowl. H. 12.7 cm.
22. Inv. 52573. Bird bowl. H. 8 cm.
23. Inv. 52592. Stemmed bird bowl; birds. H. 19 cm.
24. Inv. 52613. Tripod Corinthian pyxis; bands. H. 6.8 cm; Diam. 11.3 cm.
25. Inv. 52603. Stemmed bird bowl.⁶¹ H. 14.3 cm.
26. Inv. 52614. Stemmed bird bowl; birds. H. pres. 17 cm.
27. Inv. 52611. Stemmed bird bowl. H. pres. 12.5 cm.
28. Inv. 52600. Corinthian aryballos; bands. Broken.
29. Inv. 52579. Bird bowl. H. 7.8 cm.
30. Inv. 52785. Stemmed bird bowl; birds. Broken.

Inside the pit: 18 vases (nos. **31-48**; Figs 7-8; 18). Of these, five are Boeotian (black-figure miniature krater no. **34**, stamnoid vase No. **32**, patterned kotyliske no. **36**, and two glazed pots, i.e. skyphos no. **38**, containing gaming assemblage and mug no. **40**) and 13 are Late Corinthian (pyxides nos. **33**, **35**, **37**, pyxis lids nos. **43-48**, aryballoi nos. **41**, **42**, one lying at the pelvis, stamnoid pyxis no. **31** and alabastron no. **39**).

31. Inv. 52587. Corinthian stamnoid pyxis. H. 6 cm.
32. Inv. 52590. Boeotian stamnoid vase. H. 9 cm.
33. Inv. 52581. Corinthian black-figure pyxis with lid; 3 swans. H. (with lid) 6.5 cm. (It was found reversed; underneath it were three shells (inv. 52784 a-γ)).
34. Inv. 52601. Boeotian black-figure miniature pedestalled krater; confronted swans. H. 8.5 cm; Diam. mouth 3.5 cm; Diam. base 4.3 cm.⁶²
35. Inv. 52580. Corinthian pyxis with lid. H. 6.5 cm.
36. Inv. 52609. Boeotian kotyliske. H. 3.5 cm.
37. Inv. 52604. Corinthian pyxidiske. H. 3.7 cm.

⁶¹ Cf. ANDREIOMENOU 2015, pl. 64, 15.3 (ca. 550 BC).

⁶² See discussion in text.

38. Inv. 52593. Boeotian black-glazed skyphos. H. 9 cm. Diam. rim 13 cm. Diam. base 7.4 cm. It contained the pebbles, shells and terracotta animal nos. **G4-G7** (Fig. 9).
39. Inv. 52586. Corinthian alabastron. H. 11 cm.
40. Inv. 52589. Black-glazed mug. H. 7 cm.
41. Inv. 52597. Corinthian aryballos; quatrefoil. H. 5 cm.
42. Inv. 52599. Corinthian aryballos; quatrefoil. H. 6 cm.
43. Inv. 52615. Corinthian pyxis lid. H. 3 cm. Diam. 11.
44. Inv. 52616. Corinthian pyxis lid. H. 2.3 cm. Diam. 6.8.
45. Inv. 52617. Corinthian pyxis lid. H. 2.5 cm. Diam. 4.8.
46. Inv. 52618. Corinthian pyxis lid. H. 2 cm. Diam. 6.1.
47. Inv. 52619. Corinthian pyxis lid. H. 2 cm. Max. Diam. 6.
48. Inv. 52620. Corinthian pyxis lid found close to skyphos no. 38. H. 3 cm. Diam. 10.7 cm.

B. Catalogue of Objects

These comprise objects nos. **G1-G7**, i.e. die, pebbles, shells and terracotta animal that were found in, or around, the skyphos no. 38 and may be interpreted as gaming pieces (Figs. 9-10); jewellery items nos. **J1-J9** (Figs. 12-15); spindle whorls nos. **SW1-SW4** (Fig. 16); metal objects (nos. **M1-M2**). All objects were found in the pit, except if noted otherwise.

Gaming assemblage: nos. **G1-G3** were found outside, while nos. **G4-G7** (Fig. 9) inside the skyphos no. 38.

G1. Inv. 52784. Die. Solid cube made of clay. Dimensions: 3.5 x 3.5 x 3.5 cm. Weight: 78.60 gr. Values: 3 and 4, 2 and 5, 1 and 25 are featured at opposite sides.

G2. Inv. 52784 a-δ. Four shells. 52784a: *Venus verrucosa*; 52784 β-δ: *bolinus brandaris* and two of the species *hexaplex trunculus*.

G3. Inv. 52785. Engraved pebble; at its centre an engraved oval circle. Diam. 3.5 cm. (Fig. 10, top left).

G4. Inv. 52786-52788 and 52790-52791: five water-worn bivalve shells of the species *spondylus gaederopus*. Inv. 52786 is a *spondylus* lower valve. It is heavy and its texture resembles marble (fossilized?). Inv. 52787 and 52788 preserve the upper and lower valve respectively. Inv. 52790 and 52791 are smaller pieces of the same species.

Inv. 52792: six natural shells. Inv. 52792a is a *pinna nobilis*; inv. 52792β is a *cerastoderma glaucum*; inv. 52792γ is an *arca noae*; 52792δ are a *cerithium*

vulgatum and two *columbellae rusticae*. (Fig. 9, two top rows). The identification of the shells is due to David S. Reese.

G5. Inv. 52793. Four pebbles, two light and two dark-coloured. (Fig. 10, two bottom rows).

G6. Inv. 52789. A broken cylindrical stone with “veins”. (Fig. 9, third row, left).

G7. Inv. 52794. Miniature terracotta figurine of a caprine adjunct to another object, possibly yoked on a carriage as one of a pair.⁶³ Its outer side is glazed. (Fig. 9, third row, right).

Jewellery (in bronze, silver, iron, faience and glass). It consisted of spirals, rings, bracelets, necklaces, beads, brooches, pins, seals and rosettes (Figs. 12-15).

J1a, b. Inv. 52795-52796. Two bracelets around left and right arm respectively. Bronze, with overlapping ends.⁶⁴ Diam.: 7.3 cm. (Fig. 12).

J2. Inv. 52797-52798. Three rings in fingers of right hand. Two were bronze spirals and one a silver ring. Diam. 2.1 cm (Fig. 12).

J3. Inv. 52799a, b -52801. Four rings in fingers of left hand: two spiral tubes, a thick ring, (diam 2.5 cm, Fig. 12) and an iron ring.

J4. Inv. 52802-52803. At least 17 pieces or fragments of spiral tubes.⁶⁵ Two of them have a spiral at either end (e.g. inv. 52802, Fig. 14 middle, which was found in the area around the feet of dead). Most items were found on the thoracic area and around the skull; a few were scattered all over.

J5. Inv. 52804. Six arched fibulae, mostly smashed: two were in the middle of the grave, the rest on or near the spine and chest.⁶⁶

J6. Inv. 52805. Eight hammered rosettes once composed of 11-12 petals; rendered in relief with double outlines and rounded ends; in the centre is a disc with dots (Fig. 12).⁶⁷ All were found around the skull and would have been attached on a head veil. Diam. 5.3 cm.

⁶³ For a yoked quadruped see HIGGINS 1954, 266, no. 976, pl. 137 (Corinthian, ca. 350 BC).

⁶⁴ Cf. ANDREIOMENOU 1997, 84. All items marked with an X on the drawing of our grave are pieces of jewellery.

⁶⁵ For spirals in general see HIGGINS 1961, 50-52; 54; 57; 61; 72; 87; 91-93; 102. LAFFINEUR 1978, 144-145. For comparanda to ours cf. ANDREIOMENOU 1997, 83, fig. 30 (second quarter 6th c. BC).

⁶⁶ Cf. ANDREIOMENOU 1997, 85-89, figs. 50-54. ANDREIOMENOU 2015, pl. 107, 19.37-46 (550 BC).

⁶⁷ Earlier (600-560 BC) rosettes of this type have their leaves bordered with a circle, while later these leaves are cut off, as here. Cf. ANDREIOMENOU 1997, 84, fig. 43. ANDREIOMENOU 2015, pl. 86, 17.31; pl. 107, 19.34-36 (550 BC). RAUBITSCHKE 1998, 75, no. 293, pl. 44 (Archaic).

J7. Inv. 52806-52807. Two pinheads in the shape of a pomegranate; pierced with two drilled holes opposite each other.⁶⁸ No. **J7a** was found on the cover slabs at the western part of the grave; no. **J7b** laid on the left part of the chest. Diam. 0.9 cm. (Fig. 13 top).

J8. Inv. 52808-52809. Two necklaces. No. **J8a** was made of several blue, disc-shaped faience beads. No. **J8b**, with 23 yellow amphiconical glass beads (found at neck, chest and all over; Fig. 13).⁶⁹

J9a, b. Inv. 52810-52811. Two faience seals from similar but different moulds; found on the left hand and once part of two rings. Shape: discoid, with back side slightly convex, and pierced lengthwise. A cast technique was used for the design. Only one preserves its greenish glazed surface. In intaglio an ibex or gazelle walking to the right; above its back is the solar disc and in front of it the hieroglyphic *nb*. Animals with long, thin body, tail curving upwards, long straight horns. Both are products of the Naucratis factory. Diam.: 1 cm. Width: 0.4 cm. (Fig. 15).⁷⁰

Spindle whorls⁷¹ (Fig. 16)

SW1. Inv. 52812. Lead, conical, found at the feet of the dead. H. 1.6 cm; diam. 3 cm.

SW2. Inv. 52813. Steatite stone, found at the feet of the dead. Diam. 2.7 cm.

SW3. Inv. 52814. Steatite stone, button-like, for fine yarn; found on the left palm. Diam. 2 cm.

SW4. Inv. 52815. Steatite stone, conical, for fine yarn; found on the left palm. Diam. 2 cm.

Metal objects

M1. Inv. 52817. Iron object resembling pliers.

M2. Inv. 52818. Bronze knife (small). Length: 13.2 cm; width: 0.5 cm.

⁶⁸ Pinheads are infrequent and occur in Akraiphian tombs of the second third of the 6th c. BC. Cf. ANDREIOMENOU 1997, 84, fig. 41; ANDREIOMENOU 2015, pl. 62, 14.14 (ca. 550 BC).

⁶⁹ For former cf. ANDREIOMENOU 2015, pl. 108, 19.53-55 (550 BC).

⁷⁰ Disc-shaped seals by the Naucratis factory (first half of 6th c. BC) with designs of animals occur in sanctuaries of female divinities and had an amuletic function. For the repertory of animals on seals found in Perachora see, e.g., DUNBABIN *et alii* 1962, 474; for a horned quadruped, ibex or gazelle (both caprines) see 501, nos. D485-D499 and 504, fig. 36. For the Naucratis factory see GORTON 1996, 91-131, esp. 97 (type XXVIII, ibex). For the few graves that contained seals see BRANN 1960, 406 (8th c. BC). One more tomb from Akraiphia is known to have contained a seal in the form of a scarab (T.254, enchytrism, excavated in 1996, unpublished).

⁷¹ Cf. ANDREIOMENOU 2015, pl. 62, 14.17 (second quarter 6th c. BC).

Illustrations

Fig. 1a-b. Grave T.171, die. Photo V. Sabetai. Copyright EFA Boeotia.

Fig. 2. Grave T.171, roll-out drawing of die. Photo V. Sabetai. Copyright EFA Boeotia.

Fig. 3. Die Inv. B 352. Photo Akademisches Kunstmuseum Bonn-Jutta Schubert.

Fig. 4. Grave T.171, section. Drawing O. Peperaki.

Fig. 5. Grave T.171, cover slabs with reversed bird bowls. Drawing O. Peperaki.

Fig. 6. Grave T.171, skeleton inside the pit. Drawing O. Peperaki.

Fig. 7a-b. Grave T.171. Sides A-B of Boeotian miniature krater, cat. no. **34**. Photo V. Sabetai. Copyright EFA Boeotia.

Fig. 8. Boeotian vases of grave T.171. Photo V. Sabetai. Copyright EFA Boeotia.

Fig. 9a-b. Grave T.171. The skyphos cat. no. **38** and its contents of shells, pebbles, terracotta animal. Photo V. Sabetai. Copyright EFA Boeotia.

Fig. 10. Grave T.171. Engraved pebble and die from outside skyphos; 4 pebbles from inside it. Photo V. Sabetai. Copyright EFA Boeotia.

Fig. 11a-c. Black figure lekythos Thebes Museum 46381. Copyright EFA Boeotia.

Fig. 12. Hand and head jewellery of the dead of T.171. Photo V. Sabetai. Copyright EFA Boeotia.

Fig. 13. Beads, pinheads and seals of the dead of T.171. Photo V. Sabetai. Copyright EFA Boeotia.

Fig. 14. Bronze jewellery (spirals) worn by the dead of T.171. Photo V. Sabetai. Copyright EFA Boeotia.

Fig. 15. Faience seals of the dead of T.171. Photo V. Sabetai. Copyright EFA Boeotia.

Fig. 16. Spindle whorls. Photo V. Sabetai. Copyright EFA Boeotia.

Fig. 17a-c. Grave T.171. Boeotian bird bowls. Photo V. Sabetai. Copyright EFA Boeotia.

Fig. 18. Corinthian vases of grave T.171. Photo V. Sabetai. Copyright EFA Boeotia.

Fig. 19. Bird bowl from T.171 in inverted position. Photo V. Sabetai. Copyright EFA Boeotia.

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Roman game finds from Cremona (Italy)

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Abstract. Finds pertaining to board games have been discovered during excavations in the northern Italian town of Cremona. Some objects were found in the recently published Piazza Marconi dig, in contexts belonging to three *domus* dated between the late Republic and the early Empire (40 BC – 69 AD). Thirteen black and white glass counters and two ivory dice were found in the remains of a wooden chest of drawers or cabinet in a probable service room of the “*Domus del ninfeo*”. A bone “Alexandrian” counter incised with a bird in flight and, on the reverse, the Roman numeral II and the Greek number B (*beta*) was found in the destruction levels following the drastic siege of Cremona by Vespasian troops during the civil war of 69 AD. Finally, a bone token in the form of an elongated parallelepiped (so-called *tessera lusoria*) with the word FICOSE inscribed on one side and the Roman numeral XIV on the other was found in the construction trench of an early Imperial house discovered during excavations underneath the Cathedral of Cremona. The paper will discuss in detail the finds, their contexts and their meanings.

Roman Cremona, glass counters, ivory dice, bone “Alexandrian” counters, board games

Περίληψη. Ευρήματα που σχετίζονται με επιτραπέζια παιχνίδια αποκαλύφθηκαν κατά την διάρκεια αρχαιολογικών ερευνών στην πόλη Κρεμόνα στην βόρεια Ιταλία. Ορισμένα αντικείμενα βρέθηκαν στην προσφάτως δημοσιευθείσα ανασκαφή της Piazza Marconi, σε σύνολα που ανήκουν σε τρεις οικίες και χρονολογούνται μεταξύ της ύστερης Δημοκρατίας και της πρώιμης αυτοκρατορικής εποχής (40 π.Χ. – 69 μ.Χ.). Δεκατρείς μαύροι και λευκοί γυάλινοι πεσσοί και δύο ζάρια από ελεφαντόδοντο βρέθηκαν στα υπολείμματα μιας ξύλινης συρταριέρας ή ερμαρίου σε ένα πιθανώς βοηθητικό δωμάτιο της «Οικίας του Νυμφαίου». Ένας οστέινος «αλεξανδρινός» πεσσός με εγχάρακτο πτηνό εν πτήσει, και, στην οπίσθια όψη, τον αριθμό II στα λατινικά και το Β (βήτα) στα ελληνικά, εντοπίστηκε στα στρώματα καταστροφής που έπονται της βίαιης πολιορκίας της Κρεμόνας από τα στρατεύματα του Βεσπασιανού κατά την διάρκεια του εμφυλίου πολέμου το 69 μ.Χ. Τέλος, ένας οστέινος πεσσός σε σχήμα επιμήκους παραλληλεπίπεδου (μια λεγόμενη *tessera lusoria*), που φέρει επιγραφή με την λέξη FICOSE στην μία πλευρά και τον λατινικό αριθμό XIV στην άλλη, βρέθηκε στην τάφρο θεμελίωσης μιας πρώιμης αυτοκρατορικής οικίας κατά την διάρκεια ανασκαφών κάτω από τον καθεδρικό ναό της Κρεμόνας. Το άρθρο παρουσιάζει λεπτομερώς τα ευρήματα, τα αρχαιολογικά τους σύνολα και την σημασία τους.

Ρωμαϊκή Κρεμόνα, γυάλινοι πεσσοί, ζάρι από ελεφαντόδοντο, οστέινο «αλεξανδρινό» πεσσοί, επιτραπέζια παιχνίδια

Riassunto. Nel corso di ricerche archeologiche condotte nella città di Cremona, in Italia settentrionale, sono stati scoperti alcuni oggetti pertinenti a giochi da tavolo. Un primo gruppo è emerso dagli scavi di Piazza Marconi, pubblicati di recente, in contesti riferibili a tre *domus* databili tra la tarda età repubblicana e la prima età imperiale (40 a.C.-69 d.C.). Tredici pedine in vetro nero e bianco e due dadi in avorio sono stati rinvenuti nei resti di una cassetiera o armadio di legno, in una stanza probabilmente di servizio della “*Domus del ninfeo*”. Un gettone “alessandrino” in osso, con inciso un uccellino in volo sul dritto e il numerale II in latino e B (*beta*) in greco sul rovescio, è stato invece individuato nei livelli di distruzione del sito, seguita al violento assedio di Cremona da parte delle truppe di Vespasiano, durante la guerra civile del 69 d.C. Infine, un elemento a forma di parallelepipedo allungato in osso (cosiddetta *tessera lusoria*), con la parola FICOSE inscritta su un lato e il numerale romano XIV sull’altro, è stato trovato nella trincea di fondazione di una casa della prima età imperiale, individuata nel corso di scavi condotti sotto la Cattedrale di Cremona. Nell’articolo, i singoli oggetti sono presentati nel dettaglio in relazione ai loro contesti di rinvenimento e se ne discutono le possibili interpretazioni.

Cremona romana, pedine in vetro, dadi in avorio, gettoni “alessandrini” in osso, giochi da tavolo

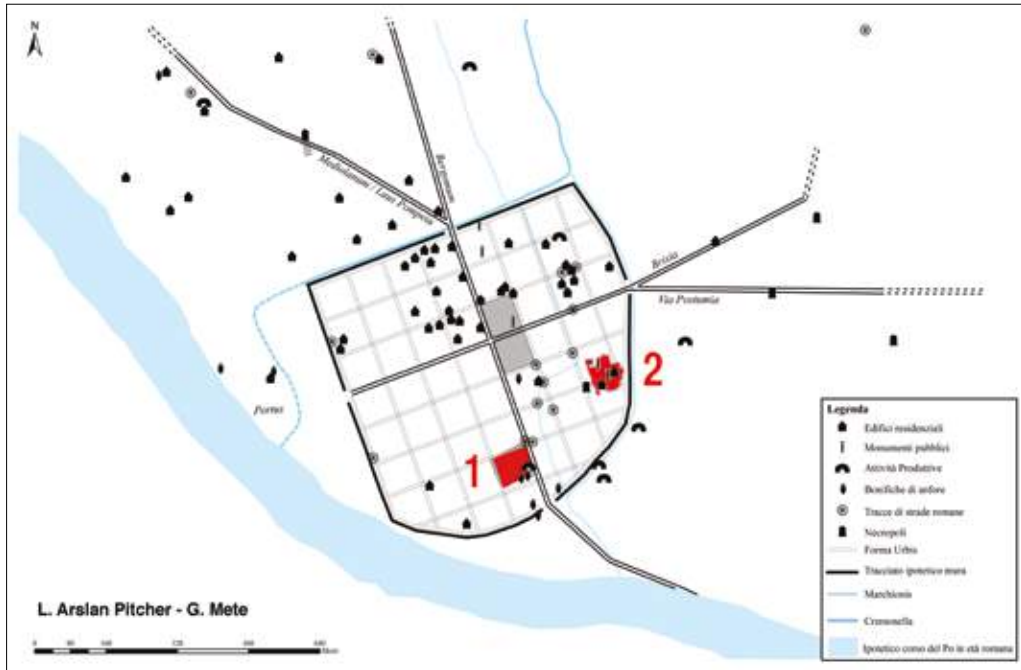


Fig. 1

Introduction

Cremona was the first Latin colony to be founded north of the Po River in 218 BC. Numerous stratigraphic excavations have been carried out since the 1980's, significant are those of Piazza Marconi and the crypt of Saint Omobono under the Cathedral (Fig. 1).¹

1. Gaming pieces from excavations in Piazza Marconi

Three different types of gaming pieces were discovered in the remains of the late Republican/early Imperial houses brought to light during digs in Piazza Marconi. In the pantry area of a wealthy residence known as the “*Domus del ninfeo*”, a burnt wooden chest of draws or closet was found collapsed on the floor of room 18 (Fig. 2),² destroyed by the fire lit by Vespasian's troops during the 69 AD civil war. The assault lasted four days according to Tacitus,³ leaving the city razed to the ground. At least

¹ For the most recent bibliography see PASSI PITCHER 1989; PASSI PITCHER 2003; PASSI PITCHER – VOLONTÉ 2007; CECCHINI 2009; ARSLAN PITCHER *et alii* 2017; ARSLAN PITCHER *et alii* 2018.

² ARSLAN PITCHER *et alii* 2017, 241-256.

³ Tac., *Hist.*, 3. 27-33.

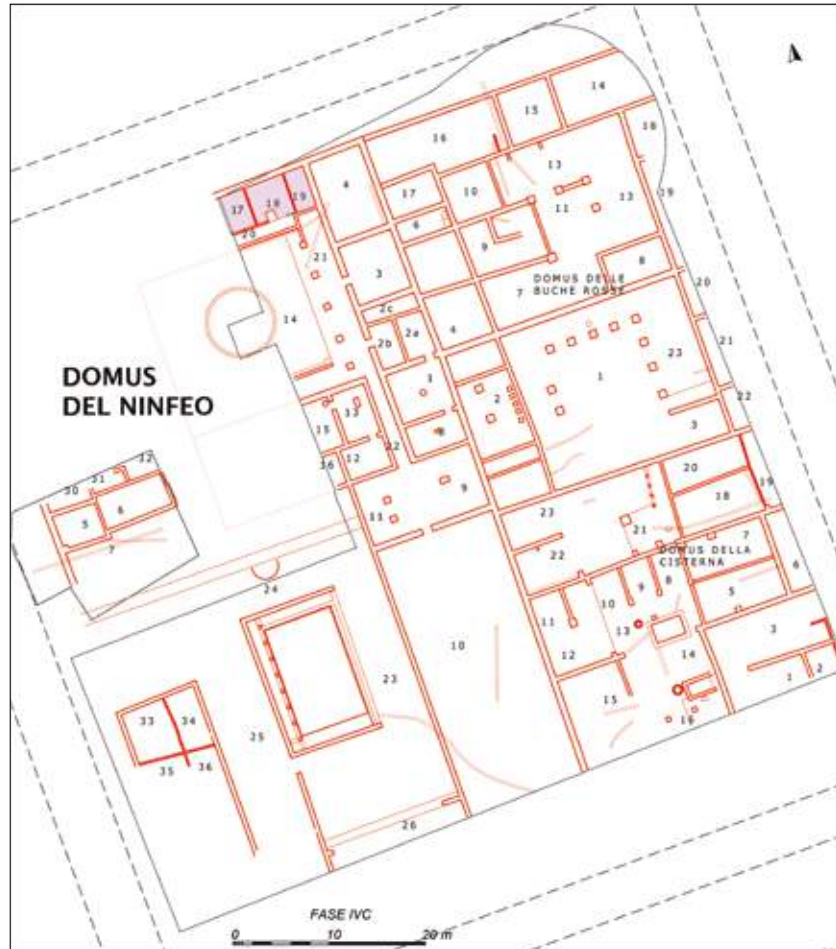


Fig. 2

120 objects were discovered on the floor; they varied from mirrors to personal ornaments to keys to part of a board game. Thirteen glass lenticular counters and two ivory dice were found (Fig. 3).⁴ Six counters were black and seven were white. Each side of the dice has a number marked by a simple circle with a dot in the centre from 1 to 6, the two opposite faces always add up to 7.

After the drastic devastation, the city was rebuilt with great cost on the part of the township and neighbouring towns and with the physical aid of

⁴ CECCHINI – BIANCHI – DIANI 2015, 124-125, nos. 3-4; DIANI 2018, 332; BIANCHI 2018, 429, pl. IV, nos. 18-19.

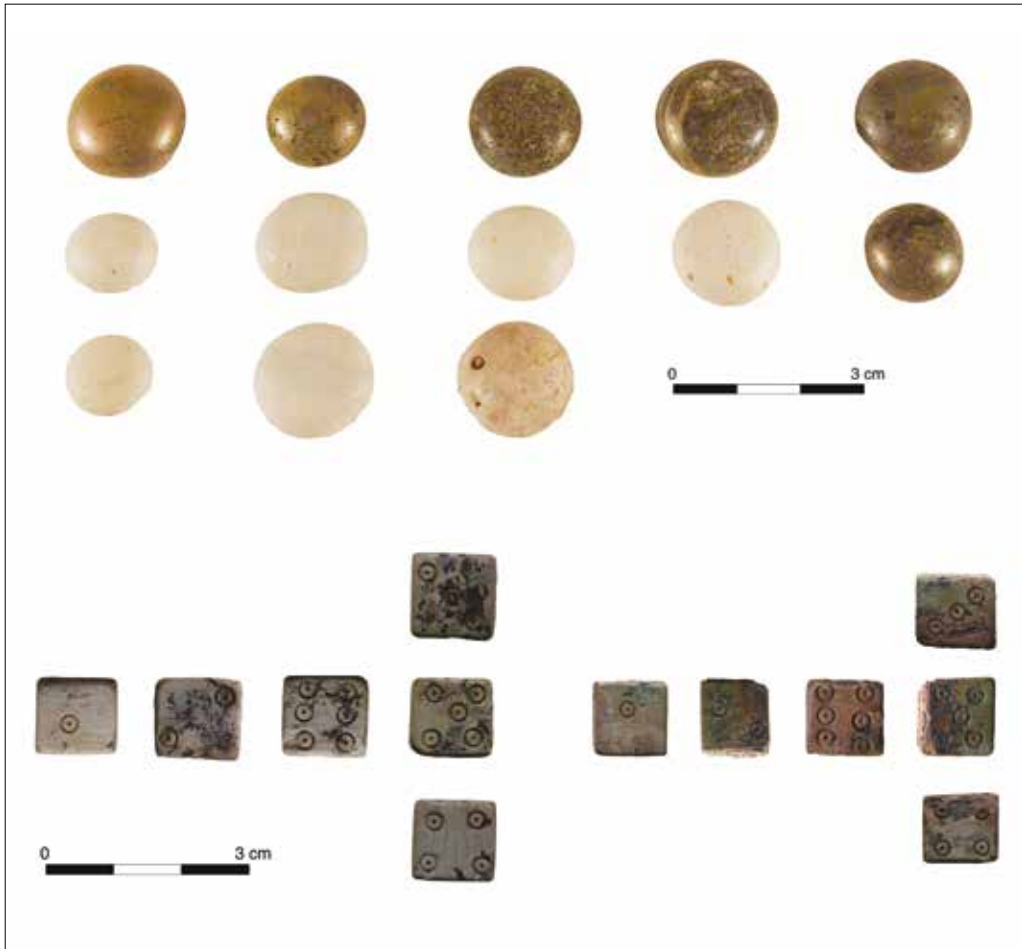


Fig. 3

the army. One of the major obstacles for the reconstruction of the city was the presence of rubble. A rather peculiar technique for clearing up the debris was introduced in the *insula* of Piazza Marconi: the western part of the block was levelled off and, on the eastern side, a series of rectangular holes were dug and part of the left over remains was used to fill in the holes so that the terrain was stabilized, allowing a good surface for the rebuilding of new houses (Fig. 4). These holes, called “*buche rosse*”, contained everyday objects from the houses such as glass, pottery, fragmented building materials, etc. No metal objects were found as the soldiers had combed the city for booty.



Fig. 4

An “Alexandrian” gaming piece was found among the finds in US 1158 (Fig. 5).⁵ The bone counter has, on the obverse side, the incised image of a small bird with a budding flower in its beak, whereas on the reverse side, there is the number given in the Latin form II and in the Greek form B (*beta*). Different types of birds are depicted on other gaming pieces as, for example, the one kept in the Musei Capitolini in Rome,⁶ one counter in Alessandria, Graeco-Roman Museum,⁷ another in Hannover, Kestner Museum⁸ and one counter from *Baetulo* (Badalona) in Spain.⁹ For the

⁵ CECCHINI – BIANCHI – DIANI 2015, 124-125, no. 2; BIANCHI 2018, 430, pl. IV, no. 23.

⁶ TALAMO 1997, 163-164, no. 456.

⁷ RIAD 1966, pl. IV, no. 9.

⁸ MLASOWSKY 1991, 74-75, no. 154.

⁹ RODRÍGUEZ MARTÍN in preparation.

flower, comparisons can be drawn from pieces representing subjects connected to the swampy areas of the Nile delta; in certain cases, a crocodile is included.¹⁰ This interpretation is supported by the word *Kyamon* carved on almost all of the latter examples. In Greek, *kyamon* designates a lotus blossom found in the Nile delta, which is described by Strabo¹¹ and Pliny the Elder.¹² The iconography of a bird with a lotus flower in its beak is also common in various Nilotic scenes popular between the Late Republic and Early Empire. A prime example can be found in mosaics of the “Casa del Fauno” in Pompeii¹³.



Fig. 5

2. “Alexandrian” counters: Some remarks on finds in archaeological contexts

The so called “Alexandrian” counters are discoid in shape and are made either of bone or ivory. On the obverse side, various figured scenes are found; on the reverse, numerals in Latin and Greek (from 1 to 15) are present, and sometimes, in the middle, an inscription in Greek identifies the subject. For a long time during the 19th century, these objects were great collectors’ items and they were analysed by many scholars.¹⁴ Initially, they were considered to be a sort of theatre ticket, but the discovery of an infant burial from Kerch in Crimea containing a complete series of fifteen counters, numbered from 1 to 15, changed the latter theory and they are now considered gaming pieces.¹⁵ The Russian historian and archaeologist Michail Rostovtsev, at the beginning of the last century, published the find from Kerch and supported this new interpretation. Many years after, since the seventies of the last century, the iconography of this particular kind

¹⁰ ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1976, 219-220, pl. 25, nos. 55-60; BIANCHI 2015, 57-59, no. 4.

¹¹ Strab., *Geogr.*, 17.1.15.

¹² Pl., *HN*, 21.51.87.

¹³ BORRIELLO *et alii* 1997, 276-277, pl. 68.

¹⁴ FRÖHNER 1884; BLANCHET 1889; GRAILLOT 1896; HÜLSEN 1896, 238-250; BULIC 1897; FRÖHNER 1901; LAURENT 1903.

¹⁵ ROSTOVTSSEV 1904, pl. III and IV, 1-3; ROSTOVTSSEV 1905, 112-114.

of counters has been carefully analysed by Elisabeth Alföldi-Rosenbaum,¹⁶ but we do not yet have a complete *Corpus* of the finds.¹⁷

“Alexandrian” counters were considered to be of Alexandrian origin because the scenes engraved often represented monuments, places of cult or landscapes connected to the city of Alexandria and to the Nile delta.¹⁸ But apart from the aforementioned scenes, other images were found: gods from the Graeco-Roman and Egyptian pantheon, but also heroes, poets, athletes, and portraits of Roman politicians and emperors from the Julio-Claudian Dynasty, for instance Julius Caesar, perhaps Antonius, Augustus, Tiberius, Nero, the women of the Julio-Claudian family such as Julia and Livia¹⁹ and also a member of the late Ptolemaic Dynasty, one of Cleopatra’s brothers, probably Ptolemy XIV.²⁰ The features do not always correspond to their respective portraits, but the subjects are explicitly defined by the inscriptions on the reverse. There are also caricatures, for example of prostitutes, theatrical masks, victory wreaths of athletic competitions along with a considerable variety of animals, plants and inanimate objects.

The numbers on the reverse do not necessarily connect with the scene on the obverse, and we find the same subject with different numbers; for instance, in the Kerch find, a head of Aphrodite is present twice but linked to different numbers. In some cases, on the obverse, hands with fingers in various positions indicate a specific number (the so called “finger calculus”) while on the reverse, there are for the most part Latin numerals, and rarely also Greek ones.²¹ There are also simpler counters without images but only with circular grooves on the obverse; on the reverse the usual numerals range from 1 to 15 in Latin and Greek.²²

¹⁶ ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1971; ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1975; ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1976; ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1980; ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1984. The pieces known by E. Alföldi-Rosenbaum were about five hundred, but recent discoveries have increased this number.

¹⁷ For a history of studies see BIANCHI 2021.

¹⁸ ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1976; FRAGAKI 2011, 17-20, 27-40, 114-119.

¹⁹ ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1980.

²⁰ WALKER 2000, p. 168, no. III.18 (the inscription is *adelphos Kleopatras*). See also PLANTZOS 2002, 38-39.

²¹ FRÖHNER 1884; ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1971; BIANCHI 2015, 60, 63, no. 16. One piece with numerals both in Latin and Greek has been recently found in Phanagoria (OSTAPENKO 2016). On “finger calculus” see also WILLIAMS – WILLIAMS 1995; GAVIN – SCHÄRLIG 2014 and GAVIN – SCHÄRLIG 2019.

²² See for example the counters from *Rudiae* (TEMPESTA 2012).

These gaming pieces can be dated between the Caesarian period and the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty with Nero (conventionally between BC 45 and AD 68) even though some pieces continued to be used for quite a while, well into the first half of the 2nd century AD.

The wide spread use of these “Alexandrian” gaming pieces can be linked to that crucial moment in history characterized by the passage from the Republic to the beginning of the Roman Empire. As is well known, Alexandria played an important role during the events that saw Julius Caesar, Mark Antony and Octavian Augustus as main figures.

We do not really know how the game was played; it is not mentioned in ancient sources and all interpretations are up to questioning.²³ One of the theories is that they were part of a board game with counters numbered from 1 to 15 even though it is difficult to understand why counters in a board game should bear numbers, especially since there is no evident correspondence between the numbers and the images. Other interpretations link them to gambling matches with drawing lots so as to obtain one complete series with the numbers from 1 to 15 or a complete set of counters with similar subjects.

The geographic diffusion of “Alexandrian” counters is wide. They have been discovered throughout the Roman world: along the coasts of the eastern Mediterranean, along the northern shores of the Black Sea, in Italy and as far away as central Europe (Fig. 6).²⁴ However, most of the examples recovered in the past by private collectors are unfortunately lacking the original provenance and context. An exemplary case is the important collection of Wilhelm Fröhner, formed between the last decades of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, which included many “Alexandrian” counters; they are now kept in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris.²⁵ The collection formed by August Kestner, who lived in Rome in the first half of the 19th century, now kept at the Kestner Museum in Hannover, also includes several counters probably purchased in the city and its surroundings.²⁶ The Jules Sambon Collection is another significant

²³ For a description of the *status quaestionis* see BIANCHI 2021.

²⁴ The distribution map of these finds (including also the counters of the simpler type with only circular grooves on the obverse) is at an initial phase, for more information on this research with some preliminary data see BIANCHI 2021.

²⁵ BAKHOUM – HELLMANN 1992; DI SANTI 2017. It is possible that some of these counters were found in Egypt.

²⁶ HENZEN 1848; MLASOWSKY 1991, 70-75.



Fig. 6

case; it included twenty-five of these counters, sold in 1911 to the La Scala Theatre Museum and now kept in the Soprintendenza Archeologica in Milan.²⁷

However, even if many pieces from the collections of important museums are of unknown provenance,²⁸ some finds from graves or urban centres can be recorded. In past finds, often only generic information about the places where the counters were found is provided, without further data. The indication of the places can however give an idea of the wide geographical diffusion of the counters. Many “Alexandrian” counters were found in Egypt, and the most important group is kept in Alexandria, at the Graeco-Roman Museum.²⁹ Various counters were also found in the Near

²⁷ BIANCHI 2015, 56-64.

²⁸ For example: JENTOFT-NILSEN 1982, 159-162, figs. 1-2, 4-5 (Getty Museum, Malibu); BUITRON – OLIVER 1985, 74-75, nos. 94-96 (Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore); BEHRENS 1940, pl. 4, no. 5 (Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, Mainz); ALFÖLDI 1942-1943, I, 4; II, pl. LX, nos. 9-13; SCHNEIDER 2005; GAGETTI 2013, 284, no. 113 (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien); MARANGOU 1976, 133, n. 282, pl. 71d-e (Benaki Museum, Athens).

²⁹ RIAD 1966 (Alexandria, Damanhur, *Oxyrhynchus*); RODZIEWICZ 2016, 40-44, 150-151; RODZIEWICZ 2007, 31-32, pl. 61, no. 495 (Alexandria); MAJCHEREK 1998, 31, fig. 4 (Alexandria, Kom-el-Dikka); PETRIE 1927, 57, pl. XLIX, no. 226; Berkeley, Phoebe Apperson Hearst Museum

East,³⁰ in Greece,³¹ in the regions of the northern shores of the Black Sea,³² in southern and central Italy,³³ in northern Italy,³⁴ in Croatia,³⁵ in southern France,³⁶ in Spain,³⁷ in Switzerland³⁸ and in Austria.³⁹

We will focus here specifically on the few cases of counters from recent excavations in towns allowing a confirmation of the date to the late Republican-early Imperial period.

In Israel, two “Alexandrian” counters with figured scenes were found in *Caesarea Maritima*: the first one in a layer dating to the years between the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD; the second one, with a hand showing

of Anthropology, Inv. 6-20514 (Tebtynis).

³⁰ COTTON *et alii* 2012, 491, no. 115 (Jerusalem); AYALON 2005, 76, nos. 293-295; AMELING *et alii* 2011, 662, no. 1799 (*Caesarea Maritima*); STERN – SHARON 1995, 36, fig. 9; AMELING *et alii* 2011, 866, no. 2145 (Tel Dor); BLANCHET 1889, 237, no. 9, 370, no. 24; HÜLSEN 1896, 240, no. 15; ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1976, 237, no. 93 (Beirut); *Kondoleon* 2000, 161, no. 46 (Antioch); GOLDMAN 1950, fig. 270, n. 4; fig. 273, no. 108; ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1976, 229, no. 14a (Tarsus); one piece purchased in Smyrna is now in Oxford, Ashmolean Museum (we would like to thank Clare Rowan for the information provided).

³¹ ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1980, 30, no. 17 (Athens); LAURENT 1903; DAVIDSON 1952, 219, pl. 99, no. 1679 (Corinth); PINGIATOGLOU 2012 (Dion); ADAM-VELENI 2009 (Thessaloniki) ROSTOVTSSEV 1905, 110, fig. 1; ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1980, 30, no. 12 (Crete); WARREN 1987-1988, 88-90, figs. 12-13 (Knossos); SACKETT 1992, 386, E68, pl. 318, no. 20 (Knossos); PLEKET *et alii* 1997 (Rhodes); *BCH* 75, 1951, p. 170; KOŽELJ – WURCH-KOŽELJ 2012, 27-29, fig. 1e (Thasos).

³² SAVELYEV 2016 (Tytaš); ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1984, 381, no. 18; ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1980, 29, no. 11 (Pontic Olbia); ROSTOVTSSEV 1904; ROSTOVTSSEV 1905 (Pantikapaion-Kerch); *Vinokurov – Treister* 2015 (Artezian Citadel); KOSTROMICHYOV 2012 (Chersonesos); OSTAPENKO 2016 (Phanagoria).

³³ COCCHIARO 1988, 171-172, nos. 306-308; COCCHIARO 1991, 171-172, figs. 102-103 (Brindisi); FERRANDINI TROISI 1997 (Taranto); BARNABEI 1886; TEMPESTA 2012, no. V.40 (*Rudiae-Rugge*); COLONNA 1890; ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1976, 229, nos. 11 and 13; 231, no. 33; BORRIELLO 2010, n. 189; GEROGIANNIS 2017, no. 5; PACE in press a, fig. 4; PACE in press b, fig. 3 (Pompeii); ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1976, 232, no. 37 (Herculaneum?); BIANCHI 2015, 57-58, nos. 2 and 4 (Capua); BIANCHI 2015, 60-61, nos. 10-11 (Pozzuoli); ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1976, 231, no. 29 (Rome); CARAVALE 1994, 89-93, nos. III, 1 e III, 3 (Rome); VIGNA 2010, no. 188 (from Tevere river); GAGETTI 2013, 283-284, no. 111 (Rome); DI MEO 2006, 211, no. II.182 (Rome); for the counters now kept in museums in Rome see TALAMO 1997, 163-164, nos. 452-457; CECI 2010, nos. 191-196; CARAVALE 1994, 88-93; RUSTICO 2013, 254, fig. 10, bottom left; GABRICI 1903, 372, fig. 10 (Bolsena).

³⁴ ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1976, 232, no. 38 (*Veleia* or Pompeii?); one piece now kept in Ozzano dell’Emilia (Bologna); DEODATO 2014, 141, fig. 160, 1 (Ivrea); CECCHINI – BIANCHI – DIANI 2015, 124-125, no. 2; BIANCHI 2018, 430, pl. IV, no. 23 (Cremona); ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1976, 230, no. 18 (Verona); BLASON SCAREL 1992; GIOVANNINI 2006a; GIOVANNINI 2006b, 340-342 (Aquileia).

³⁵ BULIĆ 1897 (*Issa-Vis*); GIUNIO 2012, 112-113, figs. 28-29 (Zadar).

³⁶ FEUGÈRE 2009, 166, nos. 710-711, figs. 55 and 57; RODET-BERLARBI – LEMOINE 2010, 389, fig. 27, e, g, h (Fréjus); BLANCHET 1889, 369, 371, no. 26 (Vaison-la-Romaine); another piece is in the Museum in Vaison-la-Romaine; MANNIEZ 1984, 45, no. 130, 133, fig. 7 (one counter of unknown provenance now kept in Montpellier).

³⁷ RODRÍGUEZ MARTÍN in preparation (*Baetulo-Badalona*).

³⁸ ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM 1976, 230, no. 22; HOLLIGER – HOLLIGER 1983, 11, fig. 4 (*Vindonissa*).

³⁹ UBL 1992 (*Lauriacum-Enns*); GOSTENČNIK 2005, 482, pl. 39, no. 1 (Magdalensberg site).

the characteristic position of “finger calculus”, in a layer dating to the years between the 1st and the 2nd century AD. Additionally, a third counter only presents circular grooves and numerals in Latin and Greek.⁴⁰

In Crete, one counter with only circular grooves and with numerals in Latin and Greek was found in Knossos during the excavations of the so-called “Unexplored Mansion” in a layer dating to the period of Hadrian-mid 2nd century AD.⁴¹

In Crimea, another counter with only circular grooves and numerals in Latin and Greek was found in the so-called “Artezian site” near Kerch, in a building (no. 10) of the earlier citadel destroyed in 46/47 AD during the war between Rome and the Bosphoran kingdom.⁴²

In Italy another similar counter with only circular grooves and the numerals in Latin and Greek was recovered in Rome during recent excavations in Corso Italia, Villino Fassi. It was discovered in the garden of a luxurious early Imperial building dating to the 1st century AD, where other gaming pieces, such as some glass and bone counters and five bone dice, were found.⁴³

In France one counter with the head of Kronos was found in *Forum Julii*-Fréjus during the excavations of the Agrippa’s naval fleet camp in Les Aiguères. Another counter with circular grooves on the obverse and numerals in Latin and Greek, one shell-shaped counter and two discoid counters with numbers only in Latin were also found.⁴⁴ The objects found in this site can be dated between 20 BC and 50-70 AD. Another “Alexandrian” counter with an erotic scene was found in Fréjus during the excavation of a residential area in Valmier.⁴⁵

The finds from graves, especially from some infant burials, are rather interesting and these contexts deserve special attention.

In Crimea (Kerch, ancient Pantikapaion), a complete series of fifteen bone counters showing the numbers from 1 to 15 was found in an infant grave with a terracotta vase dated to the 1st-2nd century AD. The bone gaming pieces were placed in a wooden and bronze box near the head of the

⁴⁰ AYALON 2005, 76, nos. 293-295.

⁴¹ SACKETT 1992, 386, E68, pl. 318, no. 20.

⁴² Vinokurov – Treister 2015.

⁴³ DI MEO 2006, 211, nos. II.171-183.

⁴⁴ FEUGÈRE 2009, 166, nos. 708-712, figs. 55 and 57.

⁴⁵ RODET-BERLARBI – LEMOINE 2010, 389, fig. 27, h.

skeleton; according to the excavation report, they were arranged in pairs with the figured sides matching.⁴⁶ The subjects of the counters are ten divinities or heroes: Zeus, Hermes, Herakles, Kronos, Aphrodite – represented twice –, Dioscoros (Polydeukes), Castor, Isis, Hera; two portraits: *Sebastos*/Augustus and *Loukiou*/Lucius?; two victory wreaths: *Heraia* and *Pafou*; a building: *Eleuseinion* (Fig. 7).

From South Italy, another complete series of fifteen bone counters was found in an infant cremation burial in Fondo Viola, Ruggie (*Rudiae*) near Lecce.⁴⁷ In the bottom of a chamber tomb, under a brick, a funerary terracotta vase contained the burned bones of a child mixed with the fifteen bone counters, all decorated only with circular grooves on the obverse; on the reverse there are the numerals from 1 to 15 in Latin and Greek.

In Brindisi, fifteen counters were found in a cremation burial (no. 15) in the via dei Cappuccini necropolis with several other gaming devices.⁴⁸ In the sealed pit of this grave, dating to the 1st century AD, a stone *cista* with a glass *olla* contained the ashes and the remains of the funeral pyre with the grave goods. Two of the counters show figured scenes on the obverse: on the first one, there is a basket on the obverse and the numeral 8 (VIII/H) on the reverse; on the second one, there is a hand showing the characteristic position of “finger calculus” on the obverse and the numeral 10 (X) only in Latin on the reverse. Other eleven counters show only circular grooves on the obverse; on the reverse there are the following numerals in Latin and Greek: 3, 4, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, on two pieces the numerals 1 and 7 were difficult to read. There are also one shell-shaped piece, with the numeral 5 (V) only in Latin on the reverse, and a smaller piece with a smooth surface.⁴⁹

In Croatia (*Iader*, Zadar) seven “Alexandrian” counters were found in a grave (no. 7/42) at Casali Maggiori (Stanovi).⁵⁰ On the obverse of the counters, there are representations of Cupids in various positions and perhaps, in one case, of Aphrodite; on the reverse there are the numerals 1, 7, 9, 11 in Latin and Greek, three counters are without inscriptions.

⁴⁶ ROSTOVTSSEV 1904, pl. III and IV, 1-3; ROSTOVTSSEV 1905, 112-114; see also ROWAN 2017.

⁴⁷ BARNABEI 1886; TEMPESTA 2012 (three of the fifteen counters are now missing).

⁴⁸ COCCHIARO 1988, 160-165, pl. V-VI; COCCHIARO 1991.

⁴⁹ See BIANCHI 2021, fig. 9.

⁵⁰ GIUNIO 2012, 112-113, figs. 28-29. We would like to thank Kornelija A. Giunio for the information provided.

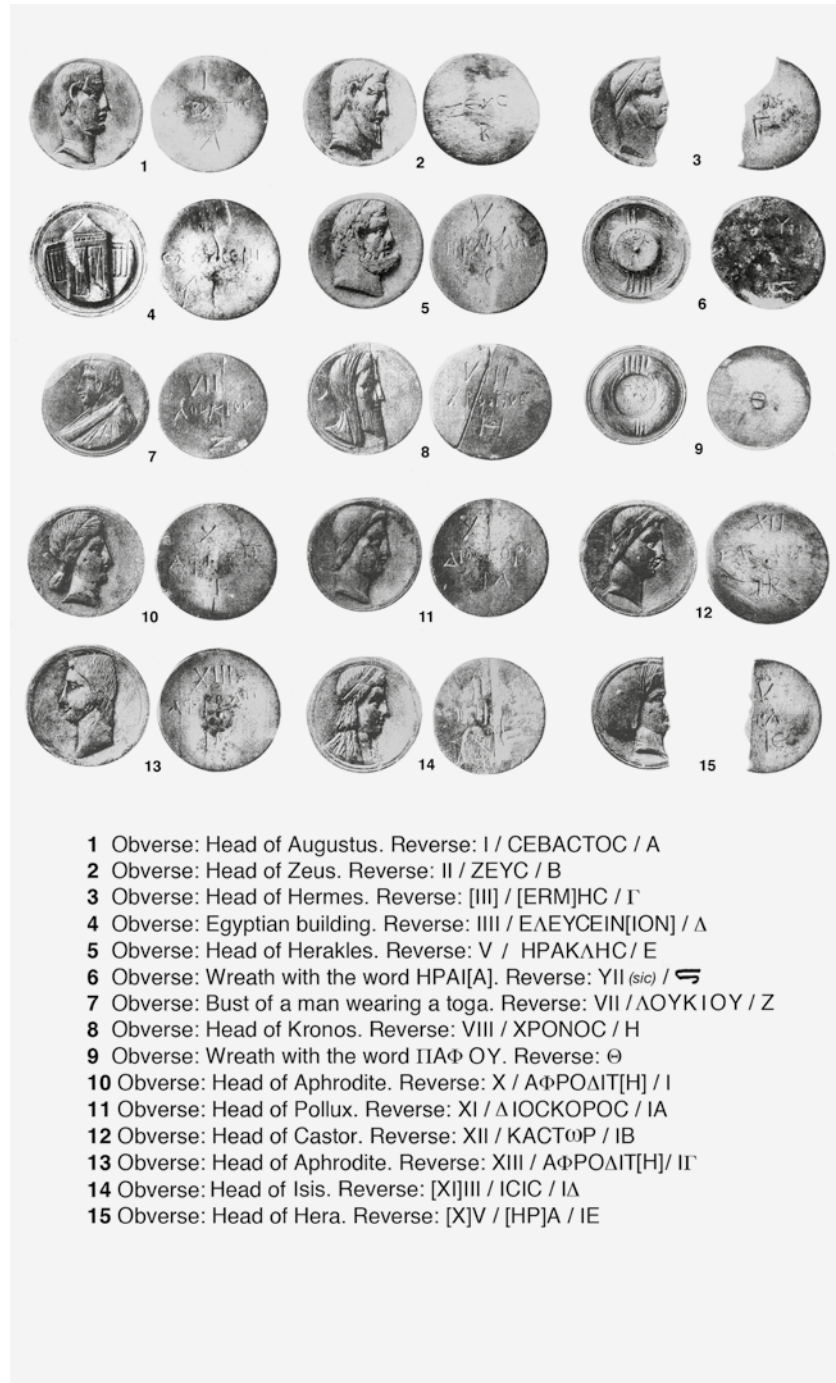


Fig. 7

In the same grave there were also one bone die, three glass balsamaries and two bronze strigils.

3. A 'tessera lusoria' from the crypt of Saint Omobono

During excavations in the crypt of Saint Omobono underneath the Cathedral of Cremona, remains of an early Imperial house and an early Christian baptistery (late 4th c. AD) were brought to light.⁵¹ A token in the form of an elongated parallelepiped with inscription (Fig. 8) was discovered within the foundations of one of the house's walls; it is therefore to be considered residual material, earlier than the construction of the *domus* and hence to be dated before BC 25.⁵²

The piece is made of bone and ends in a circular appendix with a dot framed by two engraved circles. The appendix has a hole at the binding point with the body. On one side there is the word FICOSE and on the other the number XIV. The word, an insult, is given in the vocative case, it means "covered with warts" or "suffering from haemorrhoids", it is cited by Martial in his *Epigrams*.⁵³ This name is also found on a token from Vaste associated with the number V⁵⁴ and on other pieces of unknown provenance associated with the number III⁵⁵ and with the number VII.⁵⁶

The token from Cremona belongs to the group of the so-called *tesserae lusoriae*, in bone or ivory, that were studied at the end of the 19th century by Christian Hülsen⁵⁷ and have recently been carefully analysed by Giulia Baratta.⁵⁸ Peculiar to this type is the presence, on one side, of a name in Latin usually in a nominative or appellative case. The epithets can be either offensive or benevolent, but there are some cases for which an interpretation is still difficult. Also, different verbal forms are used, such as the second person singular with VIX RIDES, "you're finally laughing" or "you're almost

⁵¹ PASSI PITCHER 1989; PASSI PITCHER – VOLONTÉ 2007; CECCHINI 2009.

⁵² CECCHINI 2009; CECCHINI – BIANCHI – DIANI 2015, 121-124, no. 1; BARATTA 2019, 123-124, cat. no. 19.

⁵³ Mart., *Epigr.*, 7.71.

⁵⁴ CAMPAGNA 1995, 262, n. 4; 282-284, fig. 25; MELISSANO 2012, no. V.39; BARATTA 2019, 151-152, cat. no. 77.

⁵⁵ BARATTA 2019, 175-179, cat. no. 135.

⁵⁶ BARATTA 2019, 211, cat. no. 206.

⁵⁷ HÜLSEN 1896.

⁵⁸ BARATTA 2014; BARATTA 2015; BARATTA 2018a; BARATTA 2018b; BARATTA 2018c; BARATTA 2018d; BARATTA 2019.



Fig. 8

laughing”, or MORARIS, probably “you stop!” or “you wait!”,⁵⁹ or in the third singular such as BENEST or MALEST, “it’s going good” and “it’s going bad”. On the other side, there is an incised numeral (numbers from I to XXV are attested, and then XXIIIX, XXIX, XXX and XL). In some cases, after the numeral, there is the nexus of the two letters A + L. The epithets may be paired with different numbers.⁶⁰ The general tendency is to associate low numbers to insults

and higher numbers to benevolent names. Examples from the Sambon Collection are carved with the insults MOICE, from the word *moechus* (adulterer), associated with the number III and TVBE (perhaps sodomite) associated with the number X; the positive name PERNIX (quick) is paired with the number XVII and FORTVNAT (lucky) with the number XXIII.⁶¹

The archaeological contexts of the finds allow us to date these tokens to the 2nd and 1st centuries BC and the beginning of the 1st century AD.

Various theories about the tokens’ use are debated.⁶² Most interpretations link them to board games or to gambling matches, but their rules are unknown. A study of the finds allows us to say that most of the tokens come from Italy, followed by Spain and southern France and, lastly, Greece and Dalmatia.⁶³

⁵⁹ Cf. the bronze token in the Cabinet des Médailles, Paris, inv. 17088 with a boardgame scene (*latrunculi*) inscribed with MORA (ROWAN 2019).

⁶⁰ For a general overview of the inscriptions and numerals see BARATTA 2019, 33-65.

⁶¹ CECCHINI 2015, 68-70, nos. 1, 3-4, 7.

⁶² See now the most recent critical essay by G. Baratta (BARATTA 2019, 101-110).

⁶³ See now the recent and complete analysis of the finds in BARATTA 2019, 71-91. Among the previous publications, BRIZIO 1887; GAMURRINI 1887; CASAGRANDE 2012 (Perugia); CAMPAGNA 1995; MELISSANO 2012, no. V.39 (Vaste); DE PALMA *et alii* 2011, 117-118, fig. 6 (Populonia); ZEI 1921, 222-223, figs. 4-5 (*Ferentum*); BARATTA 2018d (Urbisaglia); COLIVICCHI 2007, 205-206, fig. 49, nos. 506-508 (Corneto/Tarquini); BARATTA 2018c (*Pentima-Corfinio*); BANDUCCI 2015 (*Gabii*); BORRIELLO 1993, nos. 88-90 (Pompeii); ORSI 1920, 319-321 and BARATTA 2018b (Siracusa); JACOB 2012, 139-140, nos. 57-10, 58-67; 229, fig. 89 (Morgantina); ISLER 2003, 834-835 pl. CXXXIV, nos. 2-3 (Monte Iato); BALIL ILLANA 1987 (Ampurias); RODRÍGUEZ MARTÍN 2016; GUÀRDIA I LLORENS 2017, 179, fig. 3 (Puig del Castell de Samalús); DEONNA 1938, 335-336, pl. XCIV, nos. 827, 1-6 (Delos); GOSTENČNIK 2019.

Illustrations

Fig. 1. Archaeological map of Roman Cremona. 1. Piazza Marconi; 2. Cathedral.

Fig. 2. Cremona, Piazza Marconi. Plan of the late Republican/early Imperial houses; evidenced, rooms 17-18-19 of the “*Domus del ninfeo*”.

Fig. 3. Cremona, Piazza Marconi. Glass counters (Diam. min. 1.2 cm, max. 1.8 cm) and ivory dice (L. 1.3 cm and 1.1 cm) found in room 18 of the “*Domus del ninfeo*”.

Fig. 4. Cremona, Piazza Marconi. Plan of the “*buche rosse*” layer; evidenced, US 1158 where the “*Alexandrian*” counter was found.

Fig. 5. Cremona, Piazza Marconi. Bone “*Alexandrian*” counter (Diam. 3 cm) found in the “*Domus delle buche rosse*”, in one of the rectangular holes along with the rubble.

Fig. 6. “*Alexandrian*” counters: distribution map of the finds presented in the paper.

Fig. 7. Fifteen “*Alexandrian*” bone counters (Diam. min. 2.7 cm, max. 3.1 cm) showing the numbers from 1 to 15 found in an infant grave in Kerch (ancient *Pantikapaion*) in Crimea (reproduced from ROSTOVTSSEV 1904).

Fig. 8. Cremona, area under the Cathedral. Bone token (so-called *tessera lusoria*) (L. 4.5 cm) discovered within the foundations of one of the walls of an early Imperial house.

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Pavement designs and game boards from public spaces of ancient Athens: a review across the board

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Abstract. The paper aims to offer significant new additions to the record of pavements designs known from archaeological contexts in the ancient Mediterranean, giving an overview of the patterns carved on marble steps and floors in public spaces of ancient Athens. Given the problematic interpretation of carved outlines in ancient public spaces, the contribution focuses on features and locations of these patterns in the attempt to provide identification of actual game boards, contextualize them and propose their plausible chronological setting. The need to more fully understand the social and cultural dimension of play in ancient societies is now crucial to archaeological research; this paper is also offered as a contribution to approaching that understanding.

Graffiti, carved pavement designs, gameboards, Athens, Agora, public space

Περίληψη. Αυτό το άρθρο συνοψίζοντας μοτίβα εγχάρακτα πάνω σε μαρμάρινα σκαλοπάτια και δάπεδα σε δημόσιους χώρους της αρχαίας Αθήνας σκοπεύει να προσφέρει νέες, σημαντικές προσθήκες στο σύνολο των σχεδίων πάνω σε λιθόστρωτα που γνωρίζουμε από αρχαιολογικές θέσεις στην αρχαία Μεσόγειο. Δεδομένης της προβληματικής ερμηνείας των εγχάρακτων αυτών σκαριφημάτων σε αρχαίους δημόσιους χώρους, το άρθρο εστιάζει στα χαρακτηριστικά και την

θέση τους επιχειρώντας την ταυτοποίησή τους με πραγματικά επιτραπέζια παιχνίδια, την ένταξή τους στο αρχαιολογικό τους πλαίσιο και την πρόταση μιας εύλογης χρονολογικής τοποθέτησης. Η ανάγκη πληρέστερης κατανόησης της κοινωνικής και πολιτιστικής διάστασης του παιχνιδιού στις αρχαίες κοινωνίες αποτελεί πλέον κομβικό σημείο στην αρχαιολογική έρευνα. Στην προσέγγιση αυτής της κατανόησης συμβάλλει και το παρόν άρθρο.

Εγγράφακες επιγραφές, σχέδια εγγράφακα σε λιθόστρωτα, επιτραπέζια παιχνίδια, Αθήνα, Αγορά, δημόσιοι χώροι

Riassunto. Il contributo si propone di integrare il *corpus* dei graffiti pavimentali noti da contesti archeologici nel Mediterraneo antico, fornendo una rassegna dei motivi graffiti su gradini e lastricati marmorei individuati in spazi pubblici dell'Atene antica. Alla luce della problematica interpretazione dei motivi incisi sui piani di calpestio negli spazi pubblici di numerose città del mondo antico, lo studio si concentra sulle caratteristiche e le posizioni di questi schemi, nel tentativo di identificare le tavole da gioco vere e proprie, contestualizzarle e proporre un plausibile inquadramento cronologico. La necessità di comprendere più a fondo la dimensione sociale e culturale del gioco nelle società antiche è oggi cruciale per la ricerca archeologica; questo articolo si offre anche come contributo per avvicinarsi a tale comprensione.

Graffiti, tavolieri incisi, tavole da gioco pavimentali, Atene, Agorà, spazi pubblici

“It is easy to read if you know what it says.”

Eugene Vanderpool¹

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Quoted by LANG 1976, V.

Introduction

Documenting informal life experiences and human creativity within ancient cities, graffiti² in ancient public spaces are being valued as evidence of cultural significance and are gaining increasing attention in archaeological studies.³ Recent work has made important progress in investigating engraved writings, marks and geometrical patterns recorded from all over the ancient Mediterranean. Yet, contextualizing these items, chronologically and culturally, is a critical issue and their interpretation is controversial.

A common assumption in many of the studies dealing with this evidence is that pavement designs especially are to be explained as playing boards and attributed to Classical antiquity, given that the carvings tend to be linked to the period of construction of the buildings; yet, the scarce and contradictory evidence which came to us concerning rules of ancient Greek and Roman games –⁴ as well as the poor preservation of associated finds which could elucidate their function – has made the interpretation of these patterns very challenging;⁵ nonetheless, we currently attain the necessary background in this field to argue that some of these reconstructions and chronological attributions should be revised.⁶

To address this issue, the paper provides a systematic recording of the *corpus* of pavement designs detected on floors, steps and stylobates in some of the key nodes within the urban web of ancient Athens, namely the ancient and Roman Agora and the monumental complex of so called

² There is no consensus on the definition of the term “graffiti”; cf. ROUECHÉ 2014, 139; LOHMANN 2020, 46. In this work, I refer to the description proposed in FORSTER – VETTESE-FORSTER – BORLAND 2012 as “inscribed or surface applied media, forming writing or illustration, produced without expressed or implied permission”.

³ See, for instance, LANGNER 2001; BAIRD – TAYLOR 2011; KEEGAN 2014; PIEROBON BENOIT 2018. These so called “minor inscriptions” constitute now an important strand of investigation in epigraphic research for reconstructing people’s daily lives; cf. *Ductus – Association International pour l’étude des inscriptions mineures* <https://www.unil.ch/ductus/fr/home.html>. Graffiti in archaeological contexts have been also subject of a recent educational program by the Greek Ministry of Culture; Θ-INK. Το γκράφιτι ως ιστορική μαρτυρία και ως φθορά στους αρχαιολογικούς χώρους της ΕΦΑ Αθηνών: Συντήρηση και εκπαιδευτικά προγράμματα: ΠΑΠΙΔΑ – ΔΑΣΚΑΛΑΚΗΣ – ΜΥΛΩΝΑ – ΠΑΥΛΟΥ – ΚΑΤΕΒΑΣ 2016.

⁴ On this issue see DASEN 2018; DASEN 2020, 305; SCHÄDLER 2013a; SCHÄDLER 2019; SCHÄDLER 2021 with previous bibliography.

⁵ As BINSBERGEN 1997, 23, warned: “any artefact now risks to be interpreted in ludic terms”.

⁶ On this topic see the remarks expressed in ROUECHÉ 2007, 100-105; SCHÄDLER 2021, 79-97.

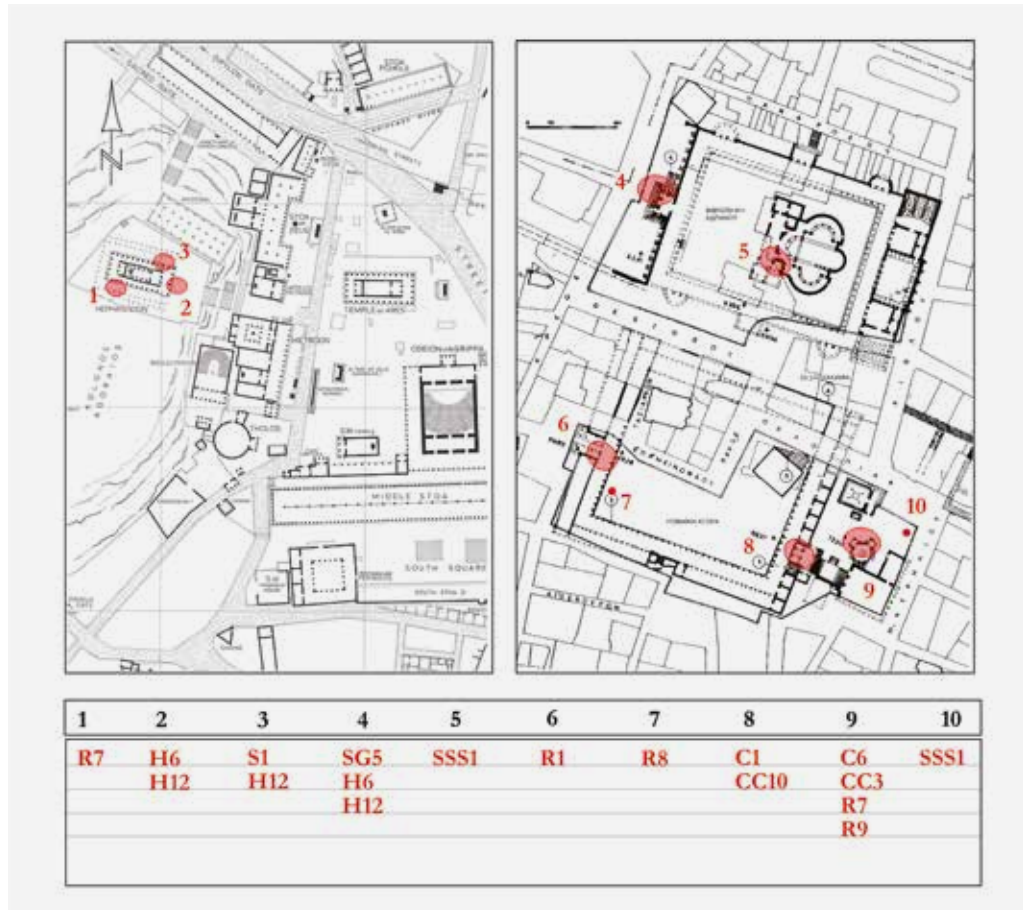


Fig. 1

Hadrian's Library (Fig. 1);⁷ this survey – based on an accurate documentation of the patterns and their exact locations –⁸ is followed by an overview of the existing literature concerning these drawings, in the attempt to gain

⁷ A catalogue of graffiti and dipinti discovered in the ancient Agorà is provided in LANG 1976; an analysis of funerary graffiti from the Hephaisteion, is offered by McCABE 2006; evidence for board games located on the three-steps base of the Horologion is published in SCHÄDLER 1995. Evidence from the other contexts is still unpublished.

⁸ For the urgency of a systematic survey of pavement markings based on a common typology providing an accurate and consistent reference *corpus* see ROUECHÉ 2014, 140. See also COULTON 1915, 61–62. Despite the lack of an agreed typology, literature on pavement markings is vast; I would just mention the survey of boards engraved in the Roman West undertaken in the framework of the ERC Locus Ludi Project (<https://elearning.unifr.ch/ludus/>); for the corpus collected in Roman Britain see COURTS – PENN 2021; for a survey of Egyptian board games see CRIST *et alii* 2016; for evidence from Northern Greece and Attica see IGNATIADOU 2019 and TAYLOR 2011 respectively.

a better understanding of this kind of evidence.

1. The patterns

1.1 Circles

Four *Circles* (C)⁹ have been detected in the area of the Roman Agora founded between 19-11 BC;¹⁰ they are precisely located at the eastern boundary of the market, on the steps of the eastern Propylon and on the three steps-base of the Horologion or Tower of the Winds, the octagonal tower erected in the middle 2nd century BC.¹¹ Although at times slightly carved or not well preserved, their structure can be defined with detail, given the resemblance with other known specimens. They consist, in the most basic version, in an outer line of variable diameter (range 25 to 40 cm); in more elaborate versions, the inner space can be variously structured (Fig. 2).

- A *single circle* (C1) is located on the grey marble slabs of the pavement of the eastern Ionic tetrastyle that opens onto the porticoed agora. It is placed immediately N of the staircase

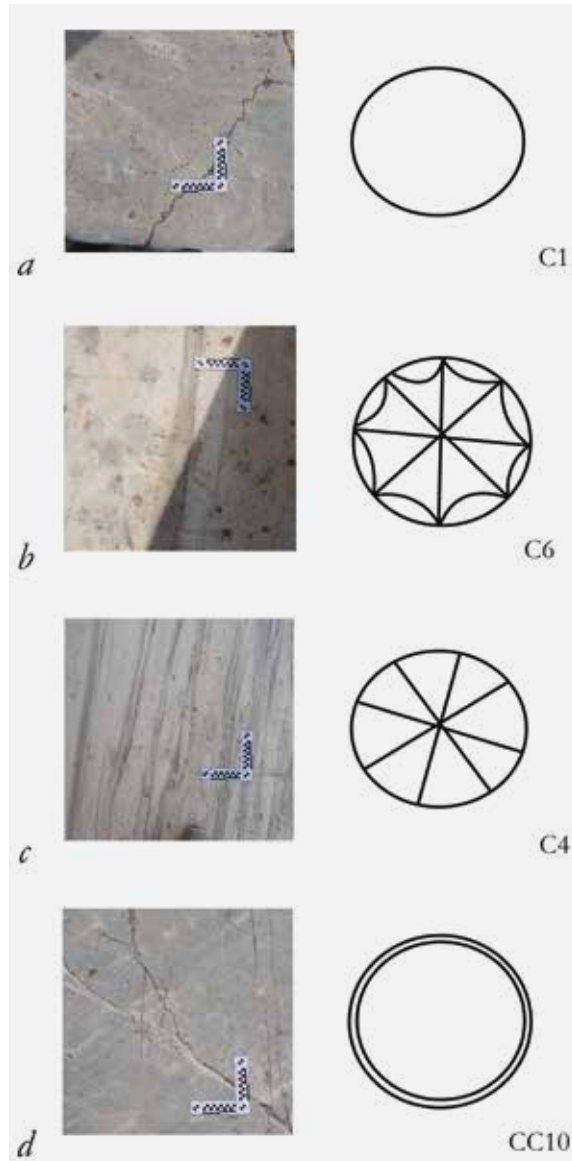


Fig. 2 a-d

⁹ In this paper, the description of pavement designs is based on the classification proposed in ROUECHÉ 2012 (Pavement Signs Typology), updated in ROUECHÉ 2014, to which I also refer for terminology used. See the open access version: <https://locusludi.ch/game-typology-c-roueche/>

¹⁰ There is a wide literature on the cited monuments and sites; for a comprehensive review see GRECO *et alii* 2014 with previous references.

¹¹ For a recent re-analysis of the monument and its chronology see KIENAST 2014.

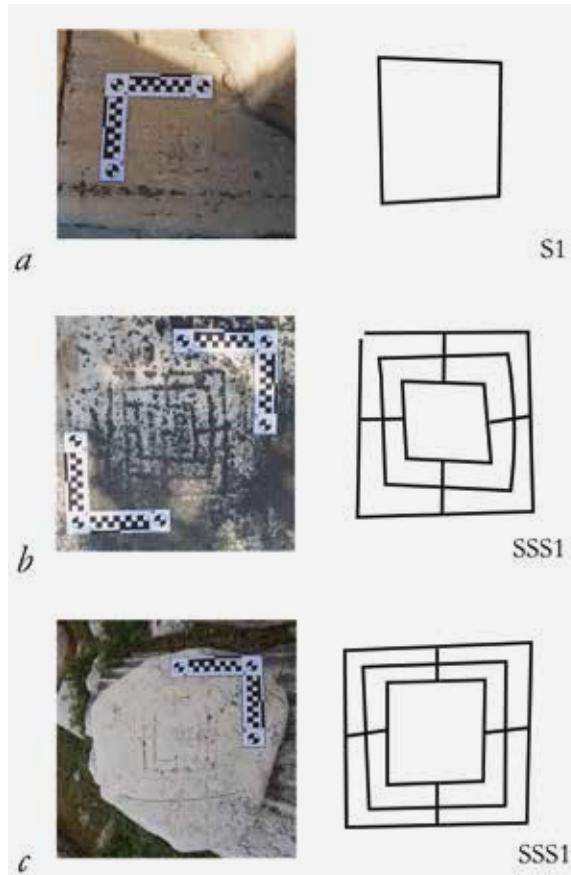


Fig. 3 a-c

ascended from the propylon to the Agoranomeion, and towards the southern edge of the slab. It consists in a circle (diam. 25 cm) bordered by a single line (Fig. 2a).

- A design consisting in a circle with 8 spokes (C4) is located on the higher step of the NW Corinthian porch of the tower; it is situated close to the entrance of the tower and approximately in line with it. The drawing includes a circle (diam. about 30 cm) crossed by 4 radial lines (Fig. 2b).
- A circle with 8 spokes and 8 arcs (C6) is located on the base of the Horologion; it is carved on the higher step of the NE Corinthian porch, adjacent and approximately on axis with the entrance. It consists in a circle (diam. 40 cm) crossed by 4 radial lines so to produce a “wheel pattern”; small arcs connect the radial lines (Fig. 2c).

- Another circular pattern (diam. 35 cm) is engraved on the steps of the propylon, S of the staircase; it is positioned near the N edge of the slab, towards the staircase. It consists in two tight-fitting concentric circles, and it can be added to the group of two concentric circles of the PST by Charlotte Roueché, representing the new type CC10 (Fig. 2d).

1.2 Squares

Patterns consisting in squares (S) are attested in proximity of the ancient Agora, engraved on the stylobate of the middle 5th century BC temple of Hephaistos erected on top of the Agoraios Kolonos hill,¹² as well as in the area of the commercial centre of Roman times, spotted on the upper surface

¹² For the extensive scholarship on the Hephaisteion see STURM 2016 with previous reference.

of an erratic capital; another square design is carved on the ruins of the so called Tetraconch Church, which occupied in the middle 5th century AD the peristyle of Hadrian's Library.¹³ Characteristics of this group of drawings is a four-sided figure of variable size, with sides of different length, whose internal space can also be variously portioned by intersecting lines, so to originate grids, or patterned with some additional internal attributes (Fig. 3).



Fig. 4

- A *single square* (S1) is engraved on the northern stylobate of the temple of Hephaistos, at the first intercolumn space from the NE corner, closed to the edge of the block; the design consists in a small-size square (12 x 8 cm), without any additional attributes (Fig. 3a).
- A design consisting in *three concentric squares* of different size (SSS1), the largest measuring 19.5 x 21 cm, is located on a block pertaining to the threshold of the tetraconch building, carved towards the edge of the slab. The squares are connected by intersecting lines and some additional attributes are likely engraved in the internal square (Fig. 3b).
- A similar design (SSS1) is carved on the top and in the mid of an erratic fragmentary capital, probably belonging to a 2nd-3rd century AD architecture: the motif consists in a regular square measuring 16 x 16 cm, encompassing other two squares of different size, connected by intersecting lines (Fig. 3c).

1.3 Square grids

The patterns consisting in *square grids* (SG) are normally variable in size, made of a varying number of square-shaped spaces laid out in rows (Fig. 4). This design is attested by a unique example, detected on the Western Propylon of Hadrian's Library, built in 132 AD.

- The *square grid* pattern is engraved on a step of the propylon, close to its edge. The grid, measuring 15 x 14 cm, bears 4 rows of 4 squares; it

¹³ KARIVIERI 1994. Also, BRENK 2001, 153-157 for a summary of the discussion and references about the problematic function of this building.

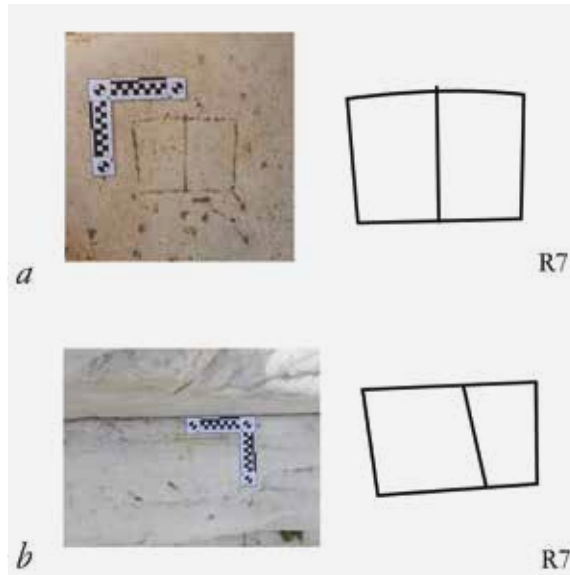


Fig. 5 a-b

squares arranged in a rectangular array of rows and columns; size and number of the squares are variable (Fig. 5).

incorporates another square diagonally placed and connected to the external one through intersecting lines. The motif is not present in the PST: it can be added to this type of drawings as **SG5**.

1.4 Rectangles

Rectangles (R) are attested by several designs traced on the ruins of the temple of Hephaistos as well as in the courtyard of the Roman Agora. The drawing consists in a rectangular-shaped figure whose internal space is divided by perpendicular lines resulting in patterns of identical

- A rectangular grid made of a row of two even squares is located on the S side of the stylobate of the temple, at the second intercolumn space from the SW corner, approximately placed in the middle of the slab. It measures 13-13.5 x 18-29 cm. A similar drawing has been located on a step of the NE Corinthian porch of the Horologion; it is measuring 27 x 15 cm and consists likewise in a row of two squares, but different in size. The motif is not present in the PST: it can be added to these series of patterns as **R7** (Fig. 5a-b).
- Two rectangles consisting in two rows of 5 squares (**R1**) are carved on a block of the peristyle that enclosed the central open space of the Roman market, precisely in front of the gate of Athena Archegetis. The patterns measure 16-17.5 x 36 cm (N) and 15 x 32 (S) respectively, and they are engraved on the same slab, orthogonally arranged (Fig. 5c).
- A similar design (**R1**) is probably located on a step of the stereobate of the temple of Hephaistos, on its N side, on a gap in the stylobate block at the second intercolumn space from the NE corner; the rectangle measures 19 x 40 cm; the design is too faint to distinguish the internal pattern (Fig. 5d).

- A rectangle consisting in two rows of 3 squares has been detected on a block of a marble *exaedra*, now placed in the area of the courtyard of the Roman agora. It measures 10 x 15 cm. The motif is not present in the PST: it can be added to this type of drawings as **R8** (Fig. 5e).

1.5 Rows

3 Rows (**3Rows**) are documented by designs traced on the first step of the NE Corinthian porch of the Horologion. The motifs – of variable size – consist in three rows of parallel lines, divided into two groups of six squares each, thus forming six groups of six squares, the centre being marked by a different graphic element (Fig. 6).

- Three drawings consisting in 3 parallel rows of regular squares have been discovered on the first step of the porch, two carved at the S edge and one scratched on the N side. The groups of six square are divided by empty spaces (**3Rows.9**) or, in one specimen, by semicircles with bases on the outmost lines and a circle in the middle line (this pattern should be added to PST as **3Rows.13**). They are not all complete, but dimensions are manifestly variable (60 x 37 cm; 55 x 39 cm; 53 x 37 cm).

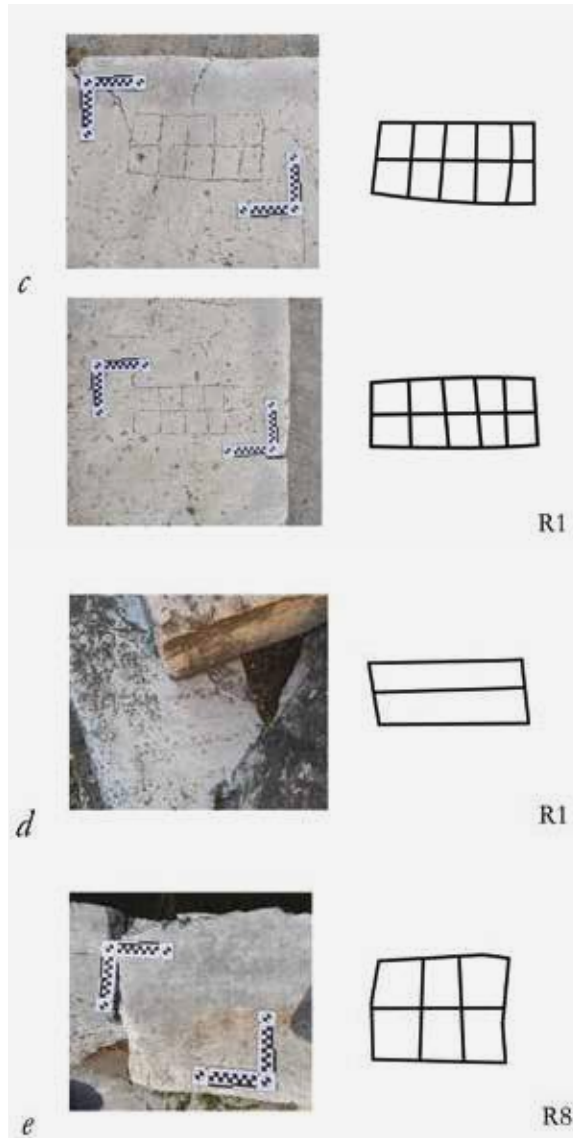


Fig. 5 c-e



Fig. 6

1.6 Holes

Holes (H) – that is to say rows of pits or shallow cavities variously arranged – have been identified on the stylobate and the steps of the stereobate of the Hephaisteion as well as on the steps of the propylon of Hadrian’s

Library. Some of them display a regular arrangement, with holes lined up in regular rows and with a consistent diameter; other patterns show a rough and asymmetrical layout of cavities of variable size. Their dimensions are very different (Fig. 7).

- A drawing consisting in two regular rows of almost identical holes (diam. 3.5-4 cm) is engraved on the E side of the stylobate of the temple (**H6**), at the third intercolumn space from the SE corner. It measures 12 x 42.5 cm. The same motif – although barely legible – has been identified on the third step of the propylon of Hadrian’s Library. It measures 10 x 20 cm (Fig. 7a).
- On the same side of the stylobate, at the fourth intercolumn space from the SE corner, is a cluster of 12 small holes (about 15 x 25 cm), arranged in a sort of circle, but without any visible layout. A small hole is isolated and set at a certain distance (Fig. 7b). A similar drawing consisting in a cluster of irregularly placed holes is located on the bottom step of the stereobate of the temple, on the N side. It has an elongated shape, extended for about 50 cm, and includes 8 holes of about 4 to 8 cm in diameter, one being isolated and set at a certain distance (Fig. 7c). Other two comparable designs are carved on the first and second steps of the propylon of Hadrian’s Library; they include 13 holes and 15 holes respectively (diam. 3.5-4 cm) irregularly placed, but mostly concentrated in a sort of circle, while some others are isolated and set at a certain distance. Similar patterns are not recorded in the PST: this type of drawings can be added as **H12** (Fig. 7d).

2. Identifying game boards: a difficult story

In her essay published in 1999, Leslie Kurke¹⁴ claimed the reconstruction of ancient board games extremely difficult and inconclusive, given the

¹⁴ KURKE 1999, 252. For an overview of earlier studies see SCHÄDLER 1995.

paucity and vagueness of contemporary sources and the chronological gap in the more detailed information in our possession – offered mainly by lexicographers and commentators – which undermines its reliability.¹⁵ Since then, significant progresses have been made and the overall picture is becoming progressively richer.¹⁶ Yet, exhaustive descriptions of the relevant boards in ancient sources are deficient; likewise, material record in context (such as movable game boards or their figured representations) seems rather exceptional.¹⁷ In this context, chronology and meaning of many of the patterns recorded from archaeological sites should be still described as rather “ambiguous” and cannot be attributed easily;¹⁸ this also applies to some of the drawings presented in this catalogue.

At the present state of research, firm evidence exists to connect patterns like rectangles parted in two rows of five squares (**R1**), 3 rows of squares (**3R**), three concentric squares (**SSS1**) and square grids (**SG5**) to board games. Indeed, the first drawing has been proved to function as a Roman adaptation of the board designed for the

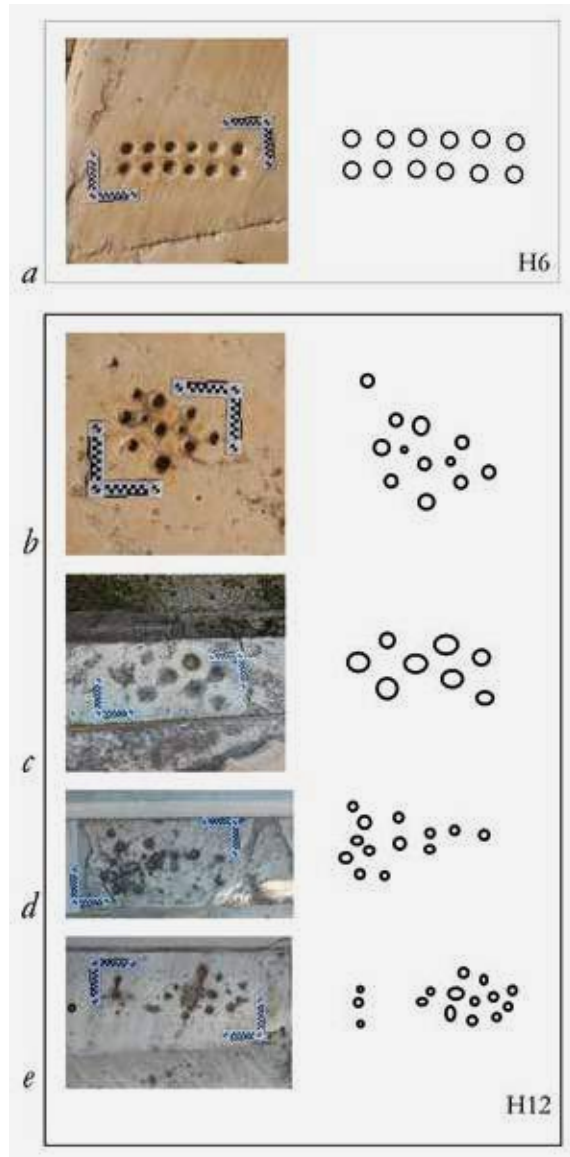


Fig. 7 a-e

¹⁵ For similar observations see SCHÄDLER 2009.

¹⁶ See, for instance, the several recent publications under the ERC *Locus Ludi* project: <https://locusludi.ch/team-publications/>

¹⁷ See the contributions by V. Dasen in this volume.

¹⁸ These drawings could have also detained different functions in space and time.

Greek game of *Pente Grammai* (Five Lines), still played in Roman times.¹⁹ Similarly, designs of three rows of 12 squares, each arranged in two groups of six squares divided by a symbol in the middle, functioned as board for Backgammon-type games, such as *Ludus duodecim scriptorium* and *Alea*.²⁰

Moreover, the concentric squares can be attributed to the so called “Nine men’s morris”, a variation of the “Three men’s morris” (Merels or Mills), a game whose rules are known from ancient sources, although its original name eludes us;²¹ nevertheless, beyond this, the age of this variant is unknown, leaving us with speculations, and there is no conclusive data to support the hypothesis of this variation being contemporary to the basic version of the game, for – as remarked by Ulrich Schädler – this design does not appear in the record until Byzantine times. The square grids drawing – somehow similar in configuration – is to be intended as an alquerque-type board (used for two different kinds of games), whose origins also go back no earlier than late antiquity.²²

The circle with spokes and arcs or “wheel pattern” (C6, CC3), interpreted as a round board for “Three men’s morris” (also known as round Merels, or Rota), is an especially problematic kind of evidence. Despite Florian Heimann’s warning²³ concerning a misreading based on a recent conjectural reconstruction by Carl Blümlein²⁴ – without any ancient evidence in support of this assumption – the understanding of this design as functional to a popular Roman game whose rules are known from antiquity²⁵ is still consolidated in literature. The suitability of this pattern to a ludic practice might be not completely ruled out, as recently emphasized

¹⁹ SCHÄDLER 2009.

²⁰ For further details about the two games and features of the relevant boards see the contribution of U. Schädler in this volume (for the analysis of the boards from Athens in particular see SCHÄDLER 1995).

²¹ SCHÄDLER 2012; SCHÄDLER 2018.

²² SCHÄDLER 2012 (also SCHÄDLER 2021, 79 for the genesis of the misconception of these games as dating back to the 14th c. BC). Nevertheless, the same designs appear frequently also in vertical positions, on walls and columns (the concentric squares design is visible, for instance, on the western façade of the Church of Agia Pantanassa, in Monastiraki square at Athens); a function other than play must be admitted (for the symbolic value of these drawings see BERGER 2004; moreover, see the contribution of F. Muscolino in this volume).

²³ HEIMANN 2014; for a recent review of the different interpretations see SCHÄDLER 2018, also for the state of art about this topic.

²⁴ BLÜMLEIN 1918, 101 (for the rules see also <https://locusludi.ch/play-ancient-online-games/>). A reconstruction of game procedures was already proposed in MERRILL 1916.

²⁵ LAMER 1927.

by Claudia-Maria Behling; yet, it is based on totally different rules and seems to involve particularly circles of larger size.²⁶ However, a wide range of other meanings could be reasonably assumed for circles – also depending on the design’s dimension – such as the function of “topos marker”, as argued by Ch. Roueché, to indicate where groups or individuals might be located for public events;²⁷ also, this pattern seems to accompany inscriptions with apotropaic or propitiatory values²⁸ or serve as device for oracular practices;²⁹ again, it can also be read as one of the possible combinations of the monogram of Christ or as graphic adaptation of the acrostic “ΙΧΘΥΣ”.³⁰

Pavement markings like *Holes* may fulfil other functions too, but their assessment in the context of gaming equipment is rather well founded. Clusters of holes arranged in varying settings (**H12**) can be understood as marble lanes, and they are documented in several Roman cities.³¹ With regard to the designs recorded here, this interpretation seems reasonable, although the cavities are quite dispersed and a finishing point is not always clearly defined; yet, this may be explained due to a poor state of preservation. More controversial is the interpretation of the pattern with two rows of cup-shaped cells (**H6**), despite them being suitable for different board games. Boards with 2 rows of 5 holes are known from Roman Asia Minor and explained as a later adaptation of the standard design for “Five Lines” (dating not earlier than 2nd c. AD), played on points instead of lines;³² yet, boards with a double row of 6 – like the one recorded here – would be not functional for this game, which requires an even number of cells. Nevertheless, a similar design might be related to Mancala-type games, which could have replaced the older Greek-Roman game, sometime between the 6th and 8th centuries AD;³³ as remarked by U. Schädler, “this would provide a context for the otherwise isolated evidence for the game being played in Greece”, recorded in modern times.³⁴

²⁶ BEHLING 2013. Another hypothesis is advanced in BELL 2007, 98, n. 3.

²⁷ ROUECHÉ 2007, 100-105.

²⁸ KAVAJA 2007, 130.

²⁹ For the correlation of this design to oracular practices at Didyma see HÖCKMANN 1996, 257-262.

³⁰ LANGNER 2001, 33.

³¹ BRUZZA 1877; SCHÄDLER 1994; SCHÄDLER 2013b, 55. See, also, CRIST *et alii* 2016, 144-146.

³² SCHÄDLER 1998, 18-19.

³³ SCHÄDLER 1998, 17 (also for differences and similarities between the two games and the relevant rules). On origin and distribution of Mancala see also DE VOOGT 1999; DE VOOGT 2021.

³⁴ See SCHÄDLER 1998, 21. Also, MURRAY 1952 and ΛΟΥΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ 1926, 137-139 for a game based on a similar mechanism recorded in Crete.

Not much can be said for certainty about a possible correlation between the other designs presented here, like single circles or simple rectangles and known play activities, although it cannot be excluded that some of these drawings are incomplete or re-elaborations of standard designs, thus, more difficult to identify. Besides, some game boards may have been used for multiple games and some games may have been played on boards with different configurations.³⁵

3. Pavement designs in context: Some remarks

The survey of features and distribution of pavement designs in Athenian public spaces offered the chance to acquire a detailed record of all of them as well as to gain substantial new information on a wide spectrum of ancient social practices.

Firstly, when analysed along with associated architectural and archaeological finds, these designs can provide additional evidence for the use of space.³⁶ The distribution of the patterns discussed here – either functional to games or intended for other uses – proves once again the correlation between material culture and public space users, revealing their crucial connection with movement and access roads, consequently, with visibility. This association is revealed, for instance, by the drawings carved in the Roman Agora, linked to the walkway connecting the Western Propylon and the Eastern access to the market, leading also to the neighbouring Agoranomion (Fig. 8), or by the patterns disclosed on the steps of the Propylon giving access to the complex of Hadrian's Library. Furthermore, along with the function of fostering networks and social interactions, pavement markings are known to play an important role in appropriation and redefinition of public spaces.³⁷ Remodelling of the urban landscape is manifestly proved by the emergence of evidence of leisure activities and forms of entertainment in spaces once regarded as consecrated to divinities and

³⁵ SCHÄDLER 1998, 10-11.

³⁶ On the other hand, we have to take into account in this regard the nature of the material remains, and bear in mind that much of the archaeological record may have been lost and the body of evidence we dispose of nowadays may represent an arbitrary selection.

³⁷ For the relation between board games and visibility and “manipulation” of public spaces see the contributions published in LAURENCE – NEWSOME 2011; in particular, TRIFILO 2011, for the use of space in the Roman Forum; furthermore, for shaping of urban spaces at Sagalassos, LAVAN 2008.

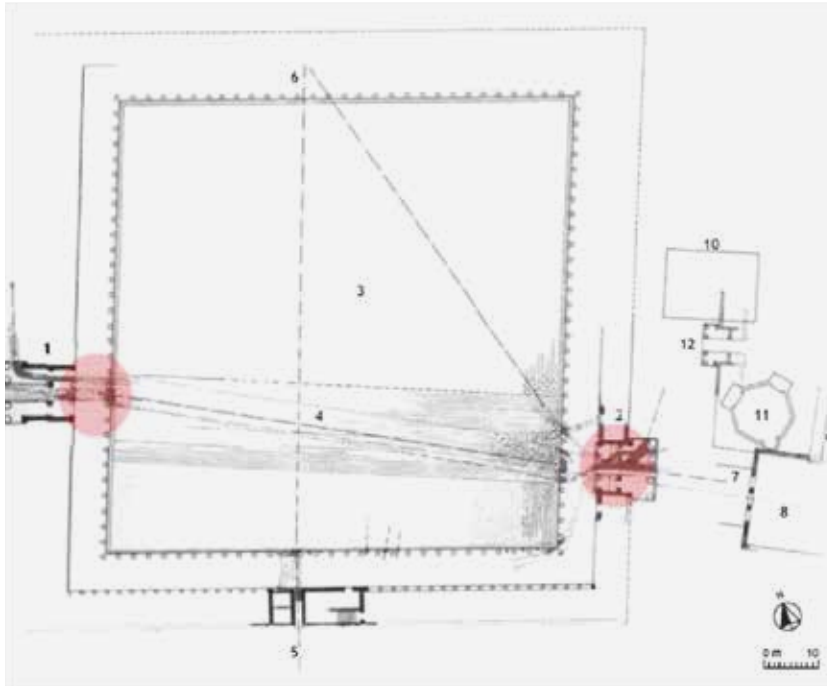


Fig. 8

inviolable, as in the case of the temple of Hephaistos,³⁸ although this transition cannot be timed precisely.³⁹

The presence of the circles divided into eight spokes may also be attributed to the same phenomenon of remodelling. Carving of Christian subjects on architectural elements was a common practice in the Byzantine world, with the aim of decorating, sacralising, perhaps even de-paganising, pagan buildings;⁴⁰ and Christian symbols carved on the walls of the Horologion/Tower of the Winds have been already explained as evidence of this process, when the area (also including the converted Agoranomion

³⁸ Evidence of the same phenomenon is discussed by KARAKITSOU 2018 about the Athenian Acropolis. For the presence of abaci in sanctuaries, which may have been used also to play, see the contribution by V. Dasen in this volume.

³⁹ As all the major Athenian temples, the temple of Hephaistos was converted into a church and suggested dates for this event range from the 4th to the 7th c. (FRANZ 1988; STURM 2016, 800). Epigraphical evidence in the area of the temple is rich and heterogeneous (varying from obituary notices to travellers' graffiti). Many inscriptions are middle Byzantine, but none can be securely dated to earlier than the 10th c. (KILLERICH 2021, 199-201); it wouldn't be implausible to date these engravings to the same period or later.

⁴⁰ Cf., among others, RUGGERI 2009, 215-216; CABIALE 2010, 43; SERVADEI 2016, 19-20.

and the neighbouring Basilica) gained a more formal place in the Christian city.⁴¹ The interpretation of the drawing as a “visual evocation” of Christ’s monogram or acronym symbol,⁴² would bring new light to the meaning of two circles with eight spokes just in front of the two accesses to the tower, converted in religious building in the Early Christian period.⁴³

Advances in understanding of ancient board games concerning chronological issues are rather limited. As a matter of fact, carved pavement designs are not necessarily datable to the same time the monument was built; buildings provide only a *terminus post quem* for the boards which could have been engraved any time after their construction. What is worth mentioning is that the Late antique chronology of the “Nine men’s morris”’s board is proved by its location on the ruins of the tetraconch church, which was destroyed in the 6th century AD.

To conclude, there is much to be gained from approaching ancient graffiti and pavement designs in context; by recognizing these patterns as archaeological artifacts, we might be able to use the large body of material not properly recorded nor published yet as evidence of numerous social activities in the ancient world.

⁴¹ FRANZ 1988, 71-72 (who also mentions Christian symbols which can be seen on the doorway of the converted Hephasteion; for the analysis of these symbols and marks, also KIENAST 2014, 146-155). A survey of the changes in urban topography and architectural landscapes deriving from Christianisation in the Aegean is offered in VIONIS 2017.

⁴² Circles with 8 spokes are to be intended “als Kryptogramm für das Chi-Rho” in Early Christian period according to HÖCKMANN 1996, 257 (Even without any Christon or letters, the wheel pattern became an image of sacredness projected on the outside of the building according to DEBIAIS 2016; for the several forms of the monogram of Christ see HÖRANDNER – WEYL CARR 1991; on the origin of Early Christian graphic signs, GARIPZANOV 2018).

⁴³ FRANZ 1988, 71-72.

Cf. STERN 2018, 39 for graffiti as marks of devotion and for patterns emerging in their spatial contexts (dominating stairwells leading to shrines).

Illustrations

Fig. 1. Distribution of the studied pavement designs (elaboration by the Author)

Fig. 2. Pavement designs typology: circles (Courtesy of the Ephorate of Antiquities of the city of Athens – photo Author)

Fig. 3. Pavement designs typology: squares (Courtesy of the Ephorate of Antiquities of the city of Athens – photo Author)

Fig. 4. Pavement designs typology: square grids (Courtesy of the Ephorate of Antiquities of the city of Athens – photo Author)

Fig. 5. Pavement designs typology: rectangles (Courtesy of the Ephorate of Antiquities of the city of Athens – photo Author)

Fig. 6. Pavement designs typology: three rows (Courtesy of the Ephorate of Antiquities of the city of Athens – photo Author)

Fig. 7. Pavement designs typology: holes (Courtesy of the Ephorate of Antiquities of the city of Athens – photo Author)

Fig. 8. Location of pavement designs in the Roman Agora (elaboration by the Author after Korres M. 2009. (ed), *Αττικής οδοί. Αρχαίοι δρόμοι της Αττικής*, Athina).

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**II.
DESIGNS OF
BOARDGAMES
AND IMAGES
OF PLAY**

Game board or abacus? Greek counter culture revisited¹

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Abstract. A late 5th century BC funerary altar from the necropolis of Krannon (Central Greece) depicts a bearded man and a boy on either side of a board with five lines carved on a block. The fact that the man is seated and the horizontal position of the board reveal important information about Greek education and the history of Greek numeracy. This paper analyses the iconography of the relief, the link between the *Five Lines* game (*Pente grammai*) and abaci, examines the possible identification of the man as a “pebble arithmetician”, of the boy as a student, and suggests a new reconstruction of the reckoning system operated on an abacus

¹ The expression “counter culture” is a verbal pun first used by R. Netz in his seminal paper (2002) on the role of counters in the cognitive history of ancient Greece.

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composed of five horizontal lines. A special practical function is proposed for the half-circle at one end of the abacus. This five lines pattern and the related material, especially counters, are considered from a wider perspective, a system of cultural practices associated with boards and counters throughout the Greek world.

Abacus, arithmetics, boardgame, tombstone, numeracy, *Pente grammai*, Achilles and Ajax

Περίληψη. Ένας επιτύμβιος βωμός που χρονολογείται στα τέλη του 5ου αιώνα π.Χ. από την νεκρόπολη της Κραννώνας (Κεντρική Ελλάδα) φέρει ανάγλυφη παράσταση ενός γενειοφόρου άνδρα και ενός αγοριού εκατέρωθεν ενός πίνακα με πέντε γραμμές σκαλισμένου πάνω σε έναν κυβόλιθο. Η καθιστή στάση του άνδρα καθώς και η οριζόντια θέση του πίνακα προσφέρουν σημαντικές πληροφορίες για την εκπαίδευση και την ιστορία της αρίθμησης στον ελληνικό κόσμο. Στο παρόν άρθρο επιχειρείται η εικονογραφική ανάλυση του αναγλύφου, εξετάζονται η σχέση μεταξύ του παιχνιδιού των πέντε γραμμών και των αβάκων, η πιθανή ταύτιση του άνδρα ως «ειδικού στην αρίθμηση με ψήφους», του αγοριού ως μαθητή, και προτείνεται μια νέα ανασύνθεση του υπολογιστικού συστήματος που πραγματοποιούσαν πάνω σε άβακα αποτελούμενο από πέντε οριζόντιες γραμμές. Μια ειδική πρακτική λειτουργία αποδίδεται στο ημικύκλιο στο ένα άκρο του άβακα. Το μοτίβο των πέντε γραμμών και το σχετιζόμενο με αυτό υλικό, ιδίως οι ψήφοι, αναλύονται σε μια ευρύτερη προοπτική, στο πλαίσιο ενός συστήματος πολιτισμικών πρακτικών που συνδέονται με πίνακες και ψήφους σε ολόκληρο τον ελληνικό κόσμο.

Άβακας, αριθμητική, επιτραπέζιο παιχνίδι, επιτύμβια στήλη, αρίθμηση, πέντε γράμμαι, Αχιλλέας και Αϊάντας

Riassunto. Un rilievo funerario databile alla fine del V sec a.C. proveniente dalla necropoli di Krannon (Grecia Centrale) raffigura un uomo barbuto e un ragazzo disposti ai lati di una tavola con cinque linee incisa su un blocco. Il fatto che l'uomo sia seduto e la posizione orizzontale della tavola rivelano importanti informazioni riguardanti l'istruzione e le tecniche di calcolo diffuse nel mondo greco. Il contributo esamina l'iconografia del rilievo, il rapporto tra il gioco delle *Cinque linee* (*Pente grammai*) e gli abachi ed analizza la possibile identificazione dell'uomo come un esperto di calcoli aritmetici basato sul conteggio dei sassolini e del ragazzo come un allievo. Inoltre, viene proposta in questa sede una nuova ricostruzione del sistema di calcolo praticato mediante un abaco composto da cinque linee orizzontali; una speciale funzione pratica è proposta per il semicerchio posto ad una delle estremità dell'abaco. Il motivo a cinque linee e il materiale associato del rilievo in questione, in particolare i gettoni per il calcolo, sono analizzati in una più ampia prospettiva, nel quadro di un sistema di pratiche culturali che implicano l'uso di tavole e pedine diffuso in tutto il mondo greco.

Abaco, Achille e Aiace, aritmetica, calcolo, cinque linee, gioco da tavola, rilievo funerario

Introduction

A late 5th century BC funerary altar from Krannon in Thessaly (Central Greece) (Fig. 1)³ depicts an unusual scene: on the right, a bearded man, wearing a tunic and a mantle, sits on an elegant *klismos* chair with curved legs and a high backrest. He extends his right hand above a rectangular block, the top of which is carved with five horizontal lines, and he points to a half-circle on the far end of the board. On the left, a young person, most likely a boy with cropped hair, wearing a *chitoniskos*, stands behind the stone, raising his left hand and looking down at a small dog trying to catch something in his hand.⁴ The name of the deceased, partly erased, ΦΑΝΑΙΟΣ (“bringing light”),⁵ is carved above his head on the panel’s frame.



Fig. 1

At first glance, the board seems to represent the structure of the so-called *Five Lines* game (πέντε γραμμαί), a race game where each player moves counters according to the throw of dice as well as to strategic skill.⁶ The aim is to be the first to gather his/her counters on the middle or “sacred line”, where the tokens are safe, especially in a knock-off variant.⁷ The relief could show a gaming scene between a male adult and a boy. No counter is visible on the board, but such detail may have been painted and have eroded with time.

³ Diachronic Museum of Larissa; BATZIOU-EFSTATHIOU – KARAGOUNIS 2013, 13 (with fig.). We thank Stella Katakouta, Ephoria and Museum of Larissa and Eftychia Alevizou for their precious help.

⁴ On this species of small dog, called *melitê*, see VESPA 2022, in press. See a youth wearing a similar folded chiton on a funerary relief from central Greece in BOSNAKIS 2012, cat. B1, pl. 13. Cf. the similar groups of a boy or girl with a dog on Attic steles: CAT 0.785, 0.787, 0.855, 0.864, 0.865, 0.874, 0.915. Dog jumping against a boy or girl: CAT 1.317, 1.321.

⁵ The online *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* provides six entries ranging from 375-2nd c. BC (Northern Greece and Asia Minor), <http://clas-igpn2.classics.ox.ac.uk>.

⁶ For the collection of ancient written sources and the reconstruction of the rules see SCHÄDLER 2009.

⁷ On the knock-off variant see KIDD 2017a. The reconstructed game in two variants can be played online: see <https://locusludi.ch/play-ancient-online-games>.

Several anomalies in the scene, however, invite us to question the methodological criteria that allow us to identify a game-board. On the Krannon relief, the identification of a *Pente grammai* board can be argued on the basis of iconographic, archaeological, and literary evidence. Yet, it could also depict a counting board with an orientation that suggests new experimentations in Greek reckoning methods.

1. Depicting *Five Lines* games

The Krannon relief does not conform to the expected iconography of board games. These scenes are mainly found on archaic Attic vase painting produced between ca. 540 and 480 BC.⁸ About 170 vases show the same heroic context: two warriors, often identified as the best homeric fighters, Achilles and Ajax,⁹ equipped with armour and weapons, sit opposite each other on block-like seats (*thakoi*), denoting an outdoor setting, and they play on a rectangular stone (Fig. 2; 510 BC)¹⁰ which may look like an altar¹¹ or may be topped by a portable board (Fig. 3; 500 BC).¹² More rarely the game takes place on a slab with transverse supports (Fig. 4; ca. 520 BC),¹³ as on miniature archaic clay models (Fig. 7; ca. 580 BC).¹⁴ Only in a few daily life scenes do the players sit at a three-legged table (*trapeza*) outdoors, as indicated by the presence of a tree (Fig. 5; 520-510 BC).¹⁵ On no

⁸ For catalogues see BUCHHOLZ 1987; KOSSATZ-DEISSMAN 1981; WOODFORD 1982.

⁹ Ten examples are recorded. The earliest vase of the series is the amphoraspined by the painter and potter Exekias, Vatican, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco Vaticano 344; *BAPD* 310395; KOSSATZ-DEISSMAN 1981, no. 397; MACKAY 2010, 327-351; SANNIBALE 2018.

¹⁰ Amphora, Essen, Museum Folkwang A 176/K1049; *BAPD* 351214; KOSSATZ-DEISSMAN 1981, no. 409; BUCHHOLZ 1987, no. 117, fig. 57a; BUNDRICK 2017, 61, fig. 6. See also the Etruscan mirror (4th c. BC), Rome, Villa Giulia 6425; BUCHHOLZ 1987, no. 14, 142-143, fig. 53.

¹¹ With volutes decoration, see e.g. Boston, MFA 01.8037; *BAPD* 200007; KOSSATZ-DEISSMAN 1981, no. 392, pl. 96 and no. 421, pl. 100; BUCHHOLZ 1987, no. 30 and no. 394, pl. 96. See also: cup, Museo nazionale etrusco di Marzabotto 489; BALDONI 2017, 420, fig. 2.

¹² Lekythos, Paris, Louvre L 34 (MNB 911). See also: column krater frgt, Atlanta, Michael Carlos Museum 2004.33.2; *BAPD* 9017853; BUNDRICK 2017, 60, fig. 5.

¹³ Amphora, once in Florence; BUCHHOLZ 1987, no. 106, fig. 56a. See also the amphora, Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum G50; *BAPD* 320078; WOODFORD 1982, D2, pl. IVb. Lekythos, London, British Museum B 638; WOODFORD 1982, F2, pl. IVc. A variant depicts two winged players: cup, Copenhagen, National museum 13521; *BAPD* 504; BUCHHOLZ 1987, 132, fig. 49e-f.

¹⁴ Copenhagen, National museum 1950; USSING 1884, 3 pl. 1; PRITCHETT 1968, 197, pl. 7, 1; SCHÄDLER 2009, 175, fig. 1 and 180, fig. 5. For parallels, SCHÄDLER 2019; CHIDIROGLOU – SCHÄDLER – SCHIERUP, 2022, in press.

¹⁵ Pelike, attributed to the Plousios Painter, private collection; R. GUY in LEIPEN 1984, 11, no. 7. See also the pelike, New York, MMA 68.27; WOODFORD 1982, pl. VI.



Figs. 2-4

vase-painting is the board placed on the knees of the players as is common in Etruscan (Fig. 8; 4th c. BC) and Roman iconography.

The warriors are depicted manipulating small pieces often painted with contrasted black and white colours (Fig. 2, 3). The meaning of their action, however, is still hotly debated. Since the 19th century, some scholars have assumed that the warriors were casting lots to determine their fate.¹⁶ The block-like shape of the table is also reminiscent of other contexts, such as voting¹⁷ and reckoning. There may be a visual reference to an abacus on the Attic black figure amphora (Fig. 2) where the warriors are moving counters on a monumental block placed on a base before the goddess Athena. Athena's name is painted on the block in the genitive case (*Athenaias*, "this belongs to Athena"), which calls to mind public abaci with state property inscriptions also in the genitive

¹⁶ On drawing lots on an altar see GERHARD 1843, 28-29, pl. XIX ("Im Lager on Troja, Brett und Würfelspieler, Loosorakel"); BUNDRICK 2017; BALDONI 2017. On the iconic value of the *bomos* as communication with the divine, FRONTISI-DUCROUX 2013.

¹⁷ On the voting-table for Achilles' weapons see BUCHHOLZ 1987, nos. 188-195, figs 58-59.

case.¹⁸ Are the warriors depicted playing, casting votes, drawing lots, consulting an oracle, or counting?

Play is the usual interpretation of these scenes. In 1869, Louis Becq de Fouquières suggested a form of *petteia* game, with *pettoi/pessoi*, “counters”, based on Pollux’s description of a game composed of five lines with a middle “sacred” line, *hiera grammê*.¹⁹ In 1963, John D. Beazley compared the scene depicted on the bilingual amphora attributed to the Andokides and Lysippides painters with the archaic clay model of a gaming table with nine lines and two dice in Copenhagen (Fig. 7) and a 4th century Etruscan mirror where the warriors play on a board seen from above with seven lines and two dice (Fig. 8),²⁰ and he suggested to identify the game with the *Five Lines* game (*Pente grammai*).²¹ Ulrich Schädler confirmed this hypothesis thanks to a black-figure kyathos in Brussels (Fig. 6; 490 BC), where the structure of the board is seen from above with five lines ending with counters on both sides.²² On a few vases, the dice are not visible, but the numbers produced by the dice thrown by the players are inscribed in full letters.²³

The agonistic and emotional components of the activity are highlighted by the characters’ animated gestures. The game has not yet come to an end, and the issue is still uncertain: a counter is seized to be moved (Fig. 2, 3)

¹⁸ See the marble counting tables in Corinth (second half of the 5th c. BC), marked as state properties: DONATI 2010, 10-12, 20-23, cat. no. 12, fig. 15 (inscr.: *damosia [trapeza] Korinthion /Dios bouleôs*, with traces of painted columns), cat. no. 13, fig. 16 (inscr.: *strata[glion Korinthion]*). The earliest abacus in the temple of Aphaia in Aegina dates to the same period (510-500 BC); IMMERWAHR 1986. Yet, other interpretations are possible: see GERLEIGNER 2020 on the inscription *Athenaia/Aias* as a palindrome in a scene featuring Aias, Cassandra, and Athena; in Essen, the painter may have played too with pairing Athena with Aias. In other contexts, the inscription *Athenaias* on an altar in vase painting can also indicate the name of the goddess: see FRONTISI-DUCROUX 2013, fig. 5.

¹⁹ Poll., *Onom.*, 9.87; BECQ DE FOUQUIÈRES 1869, 394-397. On the literary transmission of the expression “sacred line” and of the name of the game see ZUCKER 2021.

²⁰ Bronze mirror, ex. Sambon coll., ex. Museo del Teatro della Scala, Soprintendenza per l’Archeologia, le Belle Arti ed il Paesaggio della Lombardia de Milan; KÖRTE 1897, 144-146, pl. 109; MIRABELLA ROBERTI 1976, 33, no. 176; SCHÄDLER 2009, 177-178, figs 3a et 3b.

²¹ BEAZLEY 1963, no. 114, 1-7 about the amphora in Boston MFA 01.8037; BAPD 200007.

²² Kyathos, Brussels, Musées royaux d’Art et d’Histoire R2512; BAPD 306097; SCHÄDLER 2009, 176-177, fig. 2; MASSAR 2019.

²³ E.g. lekythos, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 95.15: 2 and 4 (*diofero- tetarifero*); BAPD 303417; KOSSATZ-DEISSMAN 1981, no. 403, pl. 98. Knucklebones produce other numbers: 1-3-4-6. However, the inscriptions could also designate the number of pieces already placed on the sacred line, not the result of the throw.



Figs. 5-6

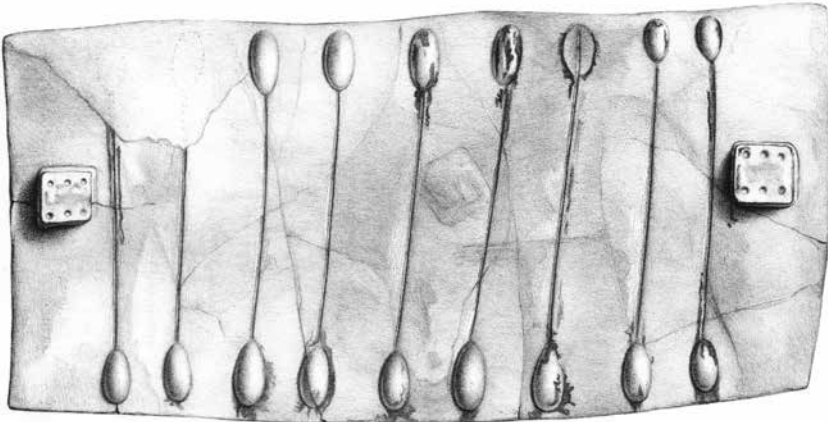


Fig. 7



Fig. 8

or it is presented to the partner;²⁴ an open hand is raised in surprise,²⁵ stretched out to invite the partner to play (Fig. 2).²⁶ Two extended fingers (Fig. 5) belong to polysemic gestures also used in agonistic contexts (scoring, declaring forfeit...), which link the figures visually and increase the liveliness of the action. The scene disappears from the repertory of vase painting after ca. 480 BC (or a little later),²⁷ and it does not seem to be used in other media like tomb reliefs.²⁸

The scene on the Krannon altar presents several characteristics that suggest that its meaning is different from the vase-painting series. No interactive play is performed: the bearded man is sitting, the boy is standing, and they do not face each other: the man looks at the boy, the boy looks down at the dog. The man points his finger towards the semi-circle, the boy seems to be entertained by his pet. To define the action, the relief has to be analysed in a wider cultural context, focusing on the posture of the man and of the boy, on the identification of the type of board, and the orientation of the five lines board associated with a semi-circle, also present in archaeological evidence.

2. The representation of a *technê*?

The man's posture is also found in the small series of archaic and classical Greek gravestones commemorating a category of professionals proud of mastering a *technê* mixing intellectual and practical skills, like medicine or

²⁴ Hydria, New York, MMA 65.11.12; *BAPD* 275093; KOSSATZ-DEISSMAN 1981, no. 425.

²⁵ Amphora, Munich, Antikensammlung 1417; *BAPD* 302081; KOSSATZ-DEISSMAN 1981, no. 411, pl. 99.

²⁶ Amphora, Basel, Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig BS 21/328; *BAPD* 7052; KOSSATZ-DEISSMAN 1981, no. 391, pl. 96.

²⁷ One red-figure exception: Berlin, Antikensammlung 319; *BAPD* 214735; KOSSATZ-DEISSMAN 1981, no. 420.

²⁸ With the possible exception of the Eretria relief, see BUCHHOLZ 1987, 133, fig. 50b; DASEN 2018, 33 (fig.).



Fig. 9

music.²⁹ The activity can be characterized by an emblematic attribute alluding to a master/disciple relation with a younger person. Thus, on a gravestone from Boeotia (440 BC),³⁰ a standing bearded man is portrayed as a music teacher, wearing a *himation* and presenting a lyre to a naked young man standing before him. Similarly, medical practitioners are depicted with the instruments of their practice. On an early fifth century gravestone from Asia Minor,³¹ a bearded medical doctor is sitting on an elegant folding stool, *diphros*, wearing fine clothes and boots, holding a long walking stick, the attribute of citizens, with two cupping devices carved between his head and that of a naked young man bringing medical instruments that allude to his training. On a late Hellenistic funerary relief from Asia Minor (Fig. 9; 1st c. BC),³² another medical doctor is sitting on a chair with a backrest, facing an altar where a priest and two individuals seem to be honouring the

²⁹ BERGER 1970, 145-149, 155-158. Commemorated individuals can have hired professions and not belong to the social elite. Cf. KOSMOPOULOU 2001.

³⁰ Basel, Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig BS 206; BERGER 1970, 149, fig. 160.

³¹ Basel, Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig BS 236; BERGER 1970, esp. 11-23.

³² Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung, Sk 804; SCHWARZMAIER 2014.



Fig. 10

deceased. Different attributes and gestures display his intellectual and practical achievements: the transmission of written knowledge is suggested by the closed scroll held in his left hand and by the other scroll brought to him, while his two outstretched fingers symbolically address an audience; moreover, a set of six surgical instruments is engraved in the field before his head, alluding to his manual skills.

On a third century tombstone, probably from northern Greece, a similar composition fixes the memory of the deceased as a scholar transmitting another type of skill, mathematics (Fig. 10).³³ On the left, the man is sitting comfortably on an elegant seat, *diphros*, with a foot stool, pointing with his index finger at a large board next to a cithara. The inscription gives his name and his profession, *Ptolemaios geometros* [*geometres*], “Ptolemaios, mathematician”. Below the *pinax* stands a young boy, his hands on his belly, in a pose suggesting obedience and concentration. As Alain Schärli demonstrated, the letters on the *pinax* conform to Greek alphabetic numeracy: it represents the most ancient visual testimony of a multiplication table or so-called “Table of Pythagoras”, possibly recited by the boy, as was usual in elementary education.³⁴ The cithara on the wall displays that music and numeracy were “sisters” *technai* to train harmony

³³ Geneva, MAH Musée d’art et d’histoire, Ville de Genève 27937; CHAMAY-SCHÄRLIG 1998; SCHÄRLIG 2001a, 99-102, fig. 4; SCHÄRLIG 2001b.

³⁴ Cf. Arist., *Top.*, 8.14, 163b on learning by heart the multiplication table of the first 10 numbers, *kephalismoï*. On tables of additions, multiplication, including exercises of metrological conversions written for or by schoolchildren on papyri, SIDOLI 2015, 389-390.

and a structured reasoning;³⁵ its presence may indicate that both teachings could be provided by the same person.³⁶

On the Krannon gravestone, the man stretches out similarly his hand towards the attribute of his *technê*, this time a board with five horizontal lines. The board could be a game-board or a counting-board alluding to the skill of a “pebble arithmetician”, as Markus Asper coined it,³⁷ mastering different types of calculation on the surface marked with lines, a category of teacher hardly mentioned by Greek authors, though arithmetic was an important part of elementary education.³⁸

3. Game-tables ... or counting-tables?

The Krannon board depicts five lines associated with a half-circle at one end. This structure is found on a series of archaeological monuments of varying size and craftsmanship, ranging from large manufactured blocks to terracotta tiles, including carved pavement or natural stones. Beside the basic five lines pattern, extended variants are composed of seven or eleven lines. They were first listed in 1965 by William K. Pritchett who identified these as boardgames for a *Five Lines* game.³⁹ In 2001, A. Schärliig provided a catalogue of 29 examples, all identified as abaci. The evidence is constantly expanding thanks to new finds,⁴⁰ but the distinction between game-tables or abaci is still an open debate between scholars.

The first criterion to distinguish a game-table from a counting board is the presence of numerals and monetary symbols in or near the lines or along the table showing that these were used to calculate, as on the large board found in the sanctuary of Amphiaraios in Oropos (Fig. 11).⁴¹

³⁵ Cf. Archytas fr. B1 on four “sister” sciences, astronomy, geometry, “logistic” (arithmetic) and music; HUFFMANN 2020.

³⁶ The relief could evidence a change in education in the Hellenistic period: see J. Chamay in CHAMAY –SCHÄRLIG 1998.

³⁷ ASPER 2009, 108-109.

³⁸ In Athens, accountants were elected by lot to keep the state accounts which shows that numeracy education was widely shared among citizens; cf. Arist., *Ath. Const.*, 48.3.

³⁹ PRITCHETT 1965 and 1968 (13 examples). See also BEAZLEY 1963 who identifies them as boardgames.

⁴⁰ SCHÄRLIG 2001a, 61-104, with earlier bibliography. See also KNOEPFLER 2000, 78-81. For new material see e.g. the catalogue of IGNATIADOU 2019 (all boards are identified as *Pente grammai*).

⁴¹ PETRAKOS 1997, no. 762, fig. 84; SCHÄRLIG 2001a, 67-68 fig. 3.3. See also Corinth: DONATI 2010, cat. no. 12-13; Delphi: MATHÉ 2009. Hosios Loukas: ROUSSET 2013. For the photograph of the abacus see Claire Tuan: <http://lespierresquiparlent.free.fr/ecrire-les-nombres.html>.

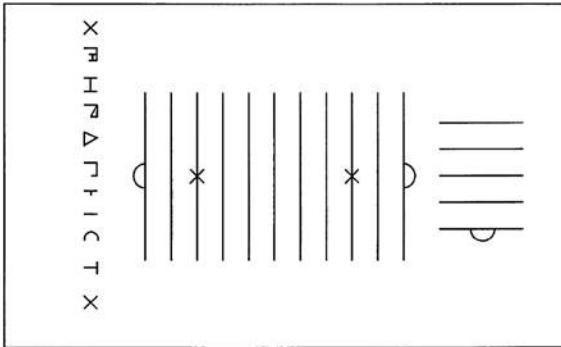


Fig. 11

As earlier studies have established, ancient Greeks had two main ways to write a number in an abbreviated way before the Indo-Arabic numeracy:⁴² acrophonic, when the number is written with the first letter of its name, such as Δ for *dekatê*, “ten”. In this system, the same sign always represents the same value whatever its position. Thus, $\Delta\Delta\Delta$ means 30.

According to A. SchärliG, this system appeared in the late 5th century BC.

The alphabetical numeracy also appears in the 5th century BC, but only becomes prevalent by the 3rd century BC. The numbers are written in capitals or minuscules using the 24 letters of the Greek alphabet, completed with three archaic letters (with varying forms), *digamma* Ϟ for 6, *koppa* Ϟ for 90, and *sampi* Ϟ for 900. The first nine letters correspond to the units, from 1 to 9 ($A = 1, B = 2, G = 3$, aso), the following letters to tens, from 10 to 90 ($I = 10, K = 20, L = 30$, aso) and the final ones to hundreds, from 100 to 900 ($R = 100, S = 200, T = 300$, aso). Again, the same sign always represents the same value, whatever its position in the written number. Thus 333 can be written as TLG or LGT.⁴³

The Indo-Arabic system allows two different operations to be performed: calculating and writing a number. The two Greek numeracy systems are characterized by a hiatus: they were efficient for writing a number but reckoning could not be performed in a satisfactory way. Neither of these two systems allowed the four operations to be carried out efficiently.

Thus, until the Indo-Arabic system became prevalent in the modern period, writing a number and reckoning (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division) were two distinct processes. Calculation was a material operation implying the manipulation of physical objects.⁴⁴ Any small device could be used as counting unit, pebbles or little stones, shells, glass counters... a well-documented technique in Greece. The earliest testimony is found in Herodotus who states that “in writing and in reckoning with pebbles

⁴² SCHÄRLIG 2001a, 43–60.

⁴³ SCHÄRLIG 2001a, 53.

⁴⁴ Cf. below Pl., *Leg.*, 819b–c on children training calculation with different types of objects.

(*psephoi*) the Greeks move the hand from left to right, but the Egyptians from right to left.”⁴⁵

Finger calculation could be associated with reckoning with counters. In a fictive letter by Alciphron (2nd c. AD), the farmer Agelarchides complains about loans and high mortgages: “They’re an awful nuisance, these people that roam about with their counters (*psephoi*) and their bent fingers.”⁴⁶

On an Etruscan gem (Fig. 12; 350-325 BC),⁴⁷ these two operations are performed and clearly dissociated: a beardless man is sitting on a *diphros* and counting by moving with his left hand three counters on a three-legged table (*trapeza*). In his right hand he is holding a tablet on which a number is engraved, possibly a total that he is checking. From top to bottom, alphabetic numbers are carved in four rows.⁴⁸

The monetary values carved on large abaci range from a fraction to thousands. These numbers are too high for gambling gains or players’ losses. These values, the monumental size of large blocks, such as those of Oropos (Fig. 11), Salamis and Epidauros, their careful carving and their location in public trading spaces argue in favour of their reckoning function. Most of them come from sanctuaries, which played a well-documented banking role at different levels (collecting fees, taxes, money deposits, currency changes, treasury record...).⁴⁹

When no numerical mark is visible, the size and the material more modest, the design reduced to the basic five lines, were the boards used



Fig. 12

⁴⁵ Hdt 2.36.4 (trans. A.D. Godley, Loeb). Pebble arithmetic is also mentioned in Aesch., *Ag.*, 570. For the collection of sources, SCHÄRLIG 2001a, 15-33.

⁴⁶ Alciphron 2.5 (Agelarchides to Pytholaos) (trans. A.R. Benner, F.H. Fobes, Loeb, modified).

⁴⁷ Paris, Cabinet des Médailles 58.1898; ZAZOFF 1968, 193, no. 1199; MENNINGER 1969, 868-869, fig. 134; AMBROSINI 2011, 73-74, no 2.2, fig. 112 a-c.

⁴⁸ Some unusual details in that image could lead to question its authenticity, especially the frame of the tablet showing possible miter cut, as Carina Weiss informs us (personal communication).

⁴⁹ IMMERWAHR 1986, 199: “The find spots also, which are often sanctuaries, favour the identification as abacus”. See also KNOEPLER 2000, 78, n. 330; MATHÉ 2009. On the banking and money-changing role of sanctuaries see e.g. BOGAERT 1968, esp. 279-304; CHANKOWSKI-SABLÉ 2014; DOYEN 2014.



Fig. 13

for counting or to play *Pente grammai*?⁵⁰ A second argument proposed by scholars is the orientation of the board. Karl Menninger and others have reconstructed a standard computation system based on vertical columns as on the Salamis board, with small crosses for separating the myriads on the left and the units on the right.⁵¹

This vertical pattern may be suggested on an Apulian volute-krater representing Darius III and a Persian embassy (Fig. 13; 330-320 BC).⁵² In the lower register, a bearded man is sitting, wrapped in a *himation* in the Greek manner, and performs a calculation on a small *trapeza*. No column is marked by lines but the pebbles are placed below a row of acrophonic symbols, based on a decimal system, for 10'000, 1000, 100, 10, 5 drachmae, 1 obole and specific signs for fractions of the obole.

| | | | | | | | |
|--------|------|-----|----|-------|---|---|---|
| M | Υ | H | ▷ | ┐ | ○ | < | T |
| 10 000 | 1000 | 100 | 10 | 5 (?) | 1 | ½ | ¼ |

⁵⁰ Cf. KNOEPFLER 2000, 78, about the Eretria board: “on connaît des tables à 5 lignes seulement – un exemple inédit se trouve à Érétie même – et il pourrait s’agir alors de tables de jeu”.

⁵¹ NAGL 1914; MENNINGER 1969, 857; SCHÄRLIG 2001.

⁵² On this scene which is a *hapax* see VILLANUEVA-PUIG 1998; SCHÄRLIG 2001a, 97-99.

However, the position of the counters may also reflect pictorial needs, not reckoning procedures. As on the Etruscan gem (Fig. 12), the man is stretching out his right hand to move counters while he holds in the left a tablet inscribed with *TALNTA H* (*sic*), 100 talents. Marie-Christine Villanueva-Puig identifies him as the treasurer of King Darius III, and the two figures in Oriental dress as Persian tribute-bearers, bringing a bag of money or gold on the right, precious plates on the left.



Fig. 14

Henry R. Immerwahr concluded that beside the indication of numerals, “the principal difference between board game and abacus is that in the former the lines must run parallel to the side where the player is sitting, while the abacus requires vertical lines, which enable the user to calculate either on the lines or in the columns between them.”⁵³

A third criterion for differentiating board games from abaci is based on three puzzling particularities.⁵⁴ The first element is the small cross marking the middle lines on extended eleven lines variants (line 3, line 6, line 9) (Fig. 11). The meaning of these crosses is difficult to determine in a game context. The crosses could indicate the middle or “sacred” lines of a large *Five Lines* board,⁵⁵ but no cross is visible on identified *Five Lines* boards with dice, like miniature clay game boards (5-11 lines) (nine lines on Fig. 7) or Etruscan mirrors (seven lines on Fig. 8). Their marking could thus be a distinctive visual cue for an abacus with a possible numerical function suggested below.

The second element is the presence of small painted circles or circular depressions at the end of each line, like the marble slab from Eretria (Fig. 14).⁵⁶ These circles have no clear use for counting but they may have

⁵³ IMMERWAHR 1986, 199.

⁵⁴ Cf. IMMERWAHR 1986, 200, n. 15 for a list of “obscure features”.

⁵⁵ PRITCHETT 1968, 187-215, esp. 193 pl. 4.1 (Salamis), 195 pl. 5.1 (Delos); SCHÄDLER 2009, 184.

⁵⁶ Marble (reemployed stele), Eretria Museum M 785; KNOEPFLER 2000, 78, fig. 13.

served to place racing counters, as depicted on an Attic skyphos (Fig. 6), on Attic miniature clay game boards (Fig. 7), and on an Etruscan mirror (Fig. 8), and they could thus characterize game-boards.

A third element is the semi-circle which is often associated with small five lines boards, as on the Eretria slab (Fig. 14).⁵⁷ It has no ludic function, as it is too small for keeping aside captured or reserve pieces. No explanation has yet been provided on its role for calculation, but the Krannon board allows us to make a hypothesis.⁵⁸

4. Reckoning with five lines and a semi-circle

Ancient authors allude to the changing value of a pebble according to its place on the counting board. According to Diogenes (3rd c. AD), Solon (6th c. BC) compared the sycophants to “the pebbles (*psephoi*) used in calculations; for just as each pebble stood now for more, now for less, so the tyrants would treat each of their courtiers now as great and famous, now as of no account.”⁵⁹ Similarly, Polybius (2nd c. BC) compares the value of Philip’s courtiers to counters:

These men are really like the pebbles (*psephoi*) on reckoning-board (*abakion*). For the pebbles, according to the will of the reckoner, have the value now of a *chalkous* [an eighth of an obol], and the next moment of a talent; while courtiers, at the nod of the king, are now happy, and the next moment lying piteously at his feet.⁶⁰

But how was the board oriented? No text describes this, nor does archaeological evidence provide a clear indication in this regard. The Krannon relief may provide a significant new piece of information to reconstruct the Greek reckoning system: the board is placed before the man sitting

⁵⁷ Salamis: SCHÄRLIG 2001a, 66, fig. 3.2. Oropos: SCHÄRLIG 2001a, 67, fig. 3.3. Goritsa/Demetrias: SCHÄRLIG 2001a, 72-73, fig. 3.7 a-b. Dhekelia: SCHÄRLIG 2001a, 75, fig. 3.11; Eretria: SCHÄRLIG 2001a, 80-81, fig. 3.18; Delphi: ΜΑΤΗÉ 2009.

⁵⁸ E.g. SCHÄRLIG 2001, 190: “Ces éléments constituent pour nous un mystère complet”; ΜΑΤΗÉ 2009, 175: “όν ne s’explique pas leur utilité”.

⁵⁹ Diog. Laert. 2.1.59 (trans. R.D. Hicks, Loeb).

⁶⁰ Polyb. 5.26.13 (trans. W.R. Paton, Loeb): Ὀντως γάρ εἰσιν οὗτοι παραπλήσιοι ταῖς ἐπὶ τῶν ἀβακίων ψήφοις· ἐκεῖναί τε γάρ κατὰ τὴν τοῦ ψηφίζοντος βούλησιν ἄρτι χαλκοῦν καὶ παραυτίκα τάλαντον ἰσχύουσιν, οἱ τε περὶ τὰς αὐλὰς κατὰ τὸ τοῦ βασιλέως νεῦμα μακάριοι καὶ παρὰ πόδας ἐλεεινοὶ γίνονται.

with the five horizontal lines and the semi-circle on the far end. This represents a major change from the current assumption that the calculator was facing vertical columns and the evidence has a significant impact on the computation possibilities. In the system based on vertical lines, only limited operations could be performed as we explained above. Yet, using horizontal lines, the four basic reckoning operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division) are far easier to perform. The procedure is not explained by Greek, nor Latin authors, but diachronic comparisons provide models. In the Renaissance, abaci were similarly oriented horizontally, and the annexe demonstrates how the small Greek abacus could similarly allow addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.

In the 1503 textbook *Margarita Philosophica* (*Pearl of Wisdom*), Gregor Reisch illustrates the section devoted to arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy with a scene of contest between two calculation methods performed by historical figures (Fig. 15): on the left the philosopher Boethius, born in Pavia (5th c. AD) is writing a calculation with Indo-Arabic numerals, whereas on the right Pythagoras (6th c. BC) calculates with counters on an abacus with four horizontal lines as on the Krannon relief, the last one marked with a cross indicating the line of thousands in German Renaissance calculation textbooks.⁶¹ In the background, the female personification of Arithmetic watches Boethius. Numbers are depicted on her dress, including an Indo-Arabic 4 still in the form of a loop. Similar scenes of reckoning on a board with horizontal lines are illustrated in Jakob Köbel, *Eynn Newe geordent Reche büchlein vff den linien mit Rechepfenigen* (Fig. 16; 1514) and Adam Ries, *Rechenung nach der lenge/ auff den Linihen vnd Feder/.../Mit grüntlichem vnterricht des visierens* (Fig. 17; 1550).



Fig. 15

⁶¹ SCHÄRLIG 2001a, 190.



Figs. 16-17

The main formal difference with the Krannon relief is that Renaissance boards have four lines while the Greek ones had five. This strengthens our hypothesis: in the Roman numeration and in our current oral numeration, we use four denominations based on a decimal system: the units, the tens, the hundreds and the thousands. Thus, when we go beyond nine units, we go to the tens. When we go beyond nine tens, we go to the hundreds, and similarly when we go beyond nine hundreds, we go to the thousands. But when one passes the nine thousands, there is no proper superior entity. The system is built with the previous denominations. Thus, one passes to tens of thousands and then to hundreds of thousands, and so on. This can explain the presence of four lines on the simplest line

surfaces found in the Renaissance: there is a line for each denomination (units, tens, hundreds, and thousands). Ancient Greeks, however, used five denominations of reference, namely the units, the tens, the hundreds, the thousands, and the myriads, which are equivalent to ten thousand. And it is only beyond the myriads that they built superior numbers with smaller denominations.

The enigmatic function of the semi-circle can be addressed by a possible reckoning explanation, especially as it is found associated with reckoning eleven lines tables on large monumental abaci in Salamis and Oropos (Fig. 11), among others.

We hypothesize that the half-circle was associated with a specificity of the Greek monetary system. The talent, worth 6000 drachmae, was an important reference value, but it could hamper the calculator as it interfered with a regular base-10 system. This duality is present on the abacus from Salamis where a numeracy series is engraved with T for one talent,

i.e. 6000 drachmae, the other with PC for 5000 drachmae according to the decimal system. Several anecdotes show that this dual system was sometimes abused for fraud.⁶² Managing stable exchange operations was crucial for money-changers and bankers. Bankers could thus convert the results into a common decimal system. This leads us to formulate the following hypothesis: the zone delimited by the semi-circle is an intermediate exchange zone. This closed area was used to place pebbles representing talents in a transitory manner. The Krannon relief suggests that such money-change operations were part of teaching exercises, as evidenced by later period arithmetic papyri for students.⁶³

5. Which board?

5.1. Abax, trapeza...

Archaeological evidence is often ambiguous. The function of boards carved with five, seven or eleven lines is uncertain when no numeracy is indicated. Similarly, the use of small pieces, stones, pebbles, shells, beads is indetermined when the archaeological context is unclear. The same type of objects could be morphologically used for both counting and play. Gaming pieces from archaeological contexts were produced in various materials, like shells, as the ones on an archaic board in Copenhagen (Fig. 7), or glass as in Hellenistic Greece.

The ambiguity of the material evidence is paralleled by the polysemy of the vocabulary. Similar terms designate a flat surface used for games, money-changing, and reckoning. The commonest one is *abax* and its diminutive *abakion* (ἄβαξ, ἄβακτιον; lat. *abacus*), which is well-attested for counting as well as for gambling. In a lost Middle Comedy play by Alexis (4th c. BC), a character asks a slave for an *abax* and counters, *psephoi*, for calculating costs, a request that suggests that such boards could be carried around and most likely made of wood.⁶⁴ The term *abax* also defined a type of board among the objects used by gamblers in the list of Pollux's *Onomasticon*:⁶⁵

⁶² Lys. (5th c. BC), *Against Diogeiton* 32.6 reports that at the death of his brother Diodotus, Diogeiton sends a dowry of five thousand drachmae, instead of one talent of 6000 drachmae, which means that he used a decimal system to cheat the woman. We thank S. Dayan for this reference.

⁶³ See BURKHALTER 2014, 565-567, on exercising converting money into drachmae in a period of change variations (e.g. 43 talents 2000 drachmae must be converted in base 10 drachmae).

⁶⁴ Alexis, *The Man who had a Cataract* (*Apeglaucomenos*), fr. 15 K.-A (= Ath. 117 c-e): "Bring an abacus and somecounting pebbles!"

⁶⁵ Poll., *Onom.*, 10.150. See a similar list in 7.203.

Utensils for the gamblers: board, little board, sieve, dice, dice to shake, knucklebones, dice-bags, dice-boxes, rimmed table, pebbles, counters.

Κυβευτοῦ σκευή· ἄβαξ, ἀβάκιον, κόσκινον, κύβοι, διάσειστοι κύβοι, ἀστράγαλοι, φιμοί, κημοί, τηλία, κήθια κηθίδια, ψῆφοι, πεττοί.

Other sources mention such game boards and allude to their weight. In the *Historical Commentaries*, Carystius of Pergamum (2nd c. BC) condemns the lack of self-control of King Philip II, addicted to drinking as well as to gambling. His *abax* was so light that it could be thrown under a bed:

Carystius says in his *Historical Commentaries*: When Philip decided to get drunk, he used to say the following: “We need to start drinking; because if Antipater is sober, that’s enough.” On one occasion, when he was shooting dice and someone announced that Antipater had arrived, he had no idea what to do and shoved the board (*abax*) he was using to keep score under his couch.⁶⁶

Gambling implies betting money,⁶⁷ and two distinct but related operations, game and counting, could take place successively on the same surface. As Photius records it: “Small abacus: on which they played and bet and did the calculations”.⁶⁸

The term *trapeza* (τράπεζα) designates a three-legged table also used for reckoning in money-changing operations and for a board game. Bankers, *τραπεζῖται*, are thus described as operating on tables, *τράπεζαι*, at the agora,⁶⁹ and in a Lysias’ plea, the trading activity of a merchant is associated with both a *trapeza* and an *abakion*, like the man on the Etruscan gem (Fig. 11).⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Carystius, fr. 3, FHG 4.357 = Ath. 10.435D (trans. Ch. Burton Gulic, Loeb).

⁶⁷ Poll., *Onom.*, 9.96: “Whoever won by number of units had to pick up the amount of money, bet on the table.” (Ὁ δ’ ὑπερβαλλόμενος τῷ πλήθει τῶν μονάδων ἐμελλεν ἀναρῆσθαι τὸ ἐπιδιακείμενον ἀργύριον).

⁶⁸ Phot., α 25: ἀβάκιον· ἐφ’ οὗ ἐκύβευον καὶ ἐφ’ οὗ τοὺς λογισμοὺς ἐποιοῦντο.

⁶⁹ Pl., *Ap.*, 17c: “in the marketplace at the bankers’ tables” (ἐν ἀγορᾷ ἐπὶ τῶν τραπεζῶν). Cf. the modern etymology of banker, after “bank”, “the bench”.

⁷⁰ Lys., *For Kallaischros*, fr. 50: “with the small abacus and the small table by putting himself on sale” (‘μετ’ ἀβακίου δὲ καὶ τραπεζίου πωλῶν ἑαυτόν).

In Late Antiquity, *τράπεζα* is synonymous with *τάβλα*,⁷¹ derived from the Latin *tabula*, which refers to a reckoning table as well as game-board.⁷² The materiality of the object is mentioned in two epigrams. In the poem attributed to Agathias scholasticus (6th c. AD), gambling is performed on a stone (marble?) board (*τάβλα/τράπεζα*):

On a board. Seated by this table made of pretty stone, you will start the pleasant game of dice-rattling.

εἰς τάβλαν. Ἐζόμενος μὲν τῆδε παρ' εὐλάιγγι τραπέζῃ/παίγνια κινή-
σεις τερπνὰ βολοκτυπίης.⁷³

In another epigram, the *τάβλα* is made of wood and used for a game with bone pieces, perhaps a *Five Lines* game as suggested by the reference to Palamedes:

On a board. Your bones, O Palamedes, should have been sawn up and made into instruments of the art that is derived from war. For being in the wars you did invent another war, the war of friends on a wooden field.

Εἰς τὴν τάβλαν. Ὅστέα σου, Παλάμηδες, ἔδει πρισθέντα γενέσθαι/
ὄργανα τῆς τέχνης τῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ πολέμου· ἐν πολέμοις/ γὰρ ἔων ἕτερον
πόλεμον κατέδειξας,/ ἐν ξυλίνῳ σταδίῳ τὸν φιλικὸν πόλεμον⁷⁴

Some terms seem to be more specific for gambling, such as *τηλία*. It designates a rimmed table that Pollux compares to a baker's tray, characterized by a high border, probably for keeping the dice from falling off.⁷⁵ Archaeological board games, especially for *Alea*, played with two or three

⁷¹ Cf. Suda τ 7 ed. Adler: *Τάβλα*. ὄνομα παιδιᾶς. ταύτην ἐφεῦρε Παλαμῆδης εἰς διαγωγὴν τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ στρατοῦ σὺν φιλοσοφίᾳ πολλῇ.

⁷² *Tabula* for play, see e.g. Varro, *Ling.*, 10.22: "A board on which they play *ludus latruncularum*" (*ut in tabula solet in qua latrunculis ludunt*). *Tabula lusoria*: Mart. 14.12 (a two-sided board for *Alea* and *Ludus Latruncularum*).

⁷³ *Anth. Pal.*, 9.767 (trans. W.R. Paton, Loeb, modified).

⁷⁴ *Anth. Pal.*, 15.18 (trans. W.R. Paton, Loeb, modified).

⁷⁵ It is also used for quails' fight, Poll., *Onom.*, 9.108: "And having drawn a circle on a board similar to a baker's tray, they set the quails in battles with one another." (Καὶ τηλία μὲν ὁμοία τῇ ἀρτοποιίῳ κύκλον ἐμπεριγράψαντες ἐνίστασαν τοὺς ὄρνυγας ἐπὶ ταῖς μάχαις ταῖς πρὸς ἀλλήλους).

dice, often have such a rim. In Roman Ephesus, the table and the board are fused on a marble table reproducing on top an *Alea* tray with handles.⁷⁶

Apart from the Late Antiquity/Byzantine τάβλα, there is no classical Greek equivalent of the generic Latin *tabula lusoria* is not found. What seems to matter is not the material playing surface, but the structural system, because the design could be drawn on any flat surface, made of wood, terracotta, stone, as well as on the natural ground. A possible generic term is διαγραμμισμός or διαγραμμίζειν, “to play on lines”, after γραμμή, “the line”, and γραμμίζειν “to draw lines”.⁷⁷ Specific terms refer to the grid of lines, like *Polis*, “the City-State”, a structure of squares that may have referred to a town with an orthogonal plan,⁷⁸ or *hiera grammē*, “the sacred line”, for the *Five Lines* game.

The commonest family of terms, however, is based on the name of the pieces, *pesoi/pettoi*, which are a type of *psephoi*.⁷⁹ *Petteia/pesseia*, “a game with pieces” designates in a generic way all games where pieces are moved. The terminology thus underscores that play is primarily an activity: for Pollux, playing boardgames means “to move counters”, *pesonomein*, and the player is “the one who moves counters”, *petteutēs*.⁸⁰ The *Alea* game similarly is designated by the throw of the die, *alea*, and *XII scripta* possibly by the highest throw, two sixes, as U. Schädler suggested quoting Nonius.⁸¹ Similarly, to reckon is “to move pebbles”, *psephizein*, an active operation with materialised numbers, *psephoi*.⁸² In Latin, the equivalent is the generic *calcolorum lusus* for

⁷⁶ SCHÄDLER 2016.

⁷⁷ Phot., *Lex.*, δ 301: “*Diagrammizein*: to play on lines” (Διαγραμμίζειν· ἐπὶ γραμμαῖς παίζειν). For the sources see COSTANZA 2019, s.v. διαγραμμισμός (Poll., *Onom.*, 9.99), and VESPA 2020, 88-89. In Philemon (4th c. BC) fr. 175 K.-A, it designates a form of *Polis*: “a game of 60 black and white squares. It is also called lines” (Διαγραμμισμός· παιδιὰ τις ἐξήκοντα ψήφων λευκῶν καὶ μελανῶν ἐν χώραις ἐλκομένων. Τὸ δὲ αὐτὸ καὶ γραμμῆς ἐκάλει); on the identification of *diagrammismos*, a Cross-Lines game see NELSON 2020.

⁷⁸ On the possible reference to the Hippodamian town plan and the different types of grids (6 x 6, 7 x 8, 8 x 8, 8 x 9, 9 x 9) see SCHÄDLER 2002, 97-98. For a 6 x 7 squares *ludus latruncolorum* board see M. Chidiroglou in this volume.

⁷⁹ On *psephos* as hyperonym including *pesoi* and other terms, see Poll., *Onom.*, 9.97, who explain that *psephoi*, pebbles, could be used as *pesoi* to play the *Five Lines* game (ἐπεὶ δὲ ψήφοι μὲν εἰσιν οἱ πεττοί, πέντε δ' ἐκάτερος τῶν παιζόντων εἶχεν ἐπὶ πέντε γραμμῶν). The contrary is not attested.

⁸⁰ Poll., *Onom.*, 9.97: τὸ δὲ πεττεύειν καὶ ἡ πεττεία καὶ τὸ πεσονομεῖν καὶ ὁ πεττευτή. Repeated *ibid.* 7.203.

⁸¹ Non., 170.22: XII *puncta tesserarum*.

⁸² According to CASEVITZ 2021, these words have no etymologies because they are borrowed, which underscores their presence among circulating practices and knowledge.

all kinds of games played with pieces,⁸³ based on *calculus*, “little stone”, used as a counter for calculation (it produced our modern “calculation”) as well as a piece for boardgames, which could be made of different material.⁸⁴

5.2. Psephoi and divination

However, moving pieces, *psephoi* or *pessoi*, according to rules was not limited to boardgames and abaci. This action also characterized other regulated practices performed on similar flat, structured surfaces. *Psephoi* used for voting were thus counted on an *abax*.⁸⁵ The overlap between games and divination is well-documented. In mantic procedures, specialists could perform “pebble divination”, *psephôn mantikê*, a skill that Apollo gave to Hermes.⁸⁶ The name of the board, however, differs for divination, which is not practiced on an *abax*, but on a *pinax* (πίναξ), though it also involves a structure and calculation, as in casting nativities.⁸⁷ In an epigram by Agathias scholasticus, the farmer Calligenes consults an astrologer who throws pebbles, *psephoi*, on a *pinax* to cast a horoscope, and then counts with his fingers.⁸⁸ More contiguities are to be found between the indeterminacy that characterizes play, especially with randomizing items like dice, and divination techniques as a way of acting on chance, as Hamayon demonstrated.⁸⁹

On a red-figure lucanian bell-krater, two satyrs wearing cloaks seem to practice divination with pebbles (Fig. 18; ca. 380–370 BC). On the left,

⁸³ E.g. Plin., *Ep.*, 7.24.5, about Ummidia Quadratilla “amusing herself with boardgames” (*laxare animum lusu calculorum*).

⁸⁴ *Calculi* are used for *ludus latrunculorum* in Ov., *Am.*, 3.358. See also Ov., *Tr.*, 4.78 (made of stone); *Panegyric on Piso*, 193 and 196 (made of glass).

⁸⁵ On voting pebbles counted on an *abax* see e.g. Arist., *Ath. Pol.*, 69.1.

⁸⁶ Apollod., *Bibl.*, 3.10.2: “But Hermes wished both to get the wand for the pipe and to acquire the art of divination. So he gave the pipe and learned the art of divining by pebbles” (trans. Sir J.G. Frazer, Loeb) (ὁ δὲ καὶ ταύτην λαβεῖν ἀντὶ τῆς σύριγγος ἤθελε καὶ τὴν μαντικὴν ἐπελθεῖν: καὶ δοῦς διδάσκεται τὴν διὰ τῶν ψήφων μαντικὴν). Philochorus, FGrHist 328 F 195: “There may be many who cast pebbles, but few prophets” (Πολλοὶ θριοβόλοι, παῦροι δὲ τε μάντιες ἄνδρες).

⁸⁷ On a mathematician casting nativities on a *pinax*, Plut., *Rom.*, 12.3: “Tarutius [...], who, besides being a philosopher and a mathematician, had applied himself to the art of casting nativities on a board, in order to indulge a speculative turn of mind, and was thought to excel in it.” (trans. B. Perrin, modified, Loeb) (ἦν Ταρούτιος [...], φιλόσοφος μὲν ἄλλως καὶ μαθηματικός, ἀπτόμενος δὲ τῆς περὶ τὸν πίνακα μεθόδου θεωρίας ἔνεκα καὶ δοκῶν ἐν αὐτῇ περιττός εἶναι).

⁸⁸ *Anth. Pal.*, 11.365: “Taking his counters and spreading them on a tray, and bending his fingers, he said to Calligenes [...]” (trans. W.R. Paton) (ὅς δὲ λαβῶν ψηφίδας, ὑπὲρ πίνακος τε πυκάζων, δάκτυλά τε γνάμπτων, φθέγγατο Καλλιγένει [...]). On finger calculation see GAVIN – SCHÄRLIG 2019.

⁸⁹ HAMAYON 2021 with earlier bibliography.



Fig. 18

a satyr, entirely wrapped in a *himation* is standing on a two-stepped base, holding a *thyrsus* with his left hand. He is facing another satyr, wearing a cloak drawn up to veil his head, sitting on a stool on a platform before a *trapeza*, pointing his finger at 6 aligned pieces. As on the Krannon relief, there is no interaction between the figures and a scene of play can be excluded. Arthur D. Trendall suggested that the scene may derive from a lost satyric theatre play and could parody an oracular consultation.⁹⁰ Pausanias and Pseudo Lucian allude to such divinatory processes

based on the observation of the *schemata*, positions, of the knucklebones thrown directly on a table, *trapeza*.⁹¹

Evidence from other cultural contexts confirms that game-boards could also be used for divination. A cuneiform tablet (177-176 BC) thus records on one side the rules of the *Twenty-Squares* game, while on the other side a grid is inscribed with the twelve zodiac signs and predictions.⁹²

Byzantine authors elaborate on the correspondences between the structure of the board, especially of the *Alea* boards, with three series of squares symbolising the course of life, past, present and future.⁹³ In the 7th century AD, John of Antioch described the cosmic symbolism of the *Alea* game or *XII scripta* that he attributes to Palamedes: the twelve sections of the board

⁹⁰ TRENDALL 1987. He suggests that it is practiced on a board with a structured surface indicated by the line of pieces.

⁹¹ Lucian, *Amores*, 16. In Bura, the oracles produced by the different combinations are inscribed on a *pinax*; Paus. 7.25.10. On this procedure well evidenced in Asia Minor epigraphy, NOLLÉ 2007.

⁹² FINKEL 1995. See also MEYER 1982 and BECKER 2007 for a comparison between the Egyptian game of twenty squares and liver models. In other cultures, divinatory technique can have a mathematical dimension, as in the *sikidy* system of Madagascar performed on a structured surface; see CHEMILLIER *et alii* 2007.

⁹³ Cf. Isid., *Etym.*, 18.64. Eustath. in Hom. *Od.* 1397, 46–47 reports that Diodorus Cronus compared the move of the *pessoi* with the revolution of stars; see KIDD 2017a, 91. On the cosmic symbolism of the game-board SCHÄDLER 2000; on the funerary symbolism of *Alea* boards in catacomb see U. Schädlér in this volume.

represent the universe, with the twelve signs of the zodiac, the seven dice in the dice box correspond to the seven planets, the tower with the sky.⁹⁴

5.2. Skirapheia: game-boards or abaci?

The find spots of large blocks in sanctuaries with five or eleven lines led some scholars hypothesize that they were board-games used by pilgrims while waiting for their turn to take an oracle, and to dismiss the elements associated with reckoning practices.⁹⁵ A similar reinterpretation of monumental abaci already took place in the Roman and Byzantine period.

The function of sanctuaries as large financial centres vanished in the Roman period, but the stone public abaci remained visible, though no more in use for reckoning purposes. Lexicographers seem to have been informed that these were boardgames and associated the term *skirapheia*, “gambling house”, with the temple of Athena Skiras. Suetonius thus explains that the Athenians meet in the sanctuaries (ἱεροῖς) to play, and Pollux specifies that “gambling houses are called *skirapheia*, because it was mainly in Athens that dice were thrown in the temple of Athena Skiras and in the area around this temple”.⁹⁶ Erudite reconstructions also fused with another tradition, that of boards for oracular practices, like Photius: “Skiron: this is a place in Athens where fortune tellers reside; there is also the shrine of Athena Skiras; and ‘Skira’ the festivals.”⁹⁷

Conclusion. Greek counter culture, where is the game?

In a seminal paper published in 2002, Reviel Netz coined the notion of “Greek counter culture” advocating the development of a cognitive

⁹⁴ Fr. 41 Roberto *Excerptum Salmasianum* p. 390, 2 (= K. Müller, *FHG*, IV p. 550); repeated by the Suda τ 7 Adler: s.v. τάβλα, ὄνομα παιδιᾶς. Ταύτην ἐφεύρε Παλαμῆδης εἰς διαγωγὴν τοῦ ἐλληνικοῦ στρατοῦ σὺν φιλοσοφίᾳ πολλῇ· τάβλα γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ γήινος κόσμος, ἰβ' δὲ κάσοι ὁ ζωδιακὸς ἀριθμὸς, τὸ δὲ ψηφοβόλον καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ ζ' κοκκία τὰ ζ' ἄστρα τῶν πλανήτων, ὁ δὲ πύργος τὸ ὕψος τοῦ οὐρανοῦ· ἐξ οὗ ἀνταποδίδεται πᾶσι πολλὰ καὶ κακὰ. A similar comparison is made by Malalas (6th c. AD), *Chron.*, 5.9 Thurn-Meier. The *Polis* game is also called *Plinthion* after πλινθος, the brick, which may allude to the rim of the mould used for pressing bricks; it designates also the square of troops, Joseph., *AJ*, 13.4.4 and the plural πλινθία the *regiones caeli* marked by the Augurs (Plut., *Rom.* 22.1).

⁹⁵ PRITCHETT, 1968, 199-200. See also e.g. WIDURA 2015, 71-81.

⁹⁶ Poll., *Onom.*, 9.96 (personal trans.): διότι μάλιστα Ἀθήνησιν ἐκύβευον ἐπὶ σκίρω ἐν τῷ τῆς Σκιράδος Ἀθηνᾶς νεῷ. Cf. Suet. *Περὶ τῶν παρ' Ἑλλήσι παιδιῶν*, 1.41-48 Taillardat: “they called *skirapheia* the places to play dice” (σκιράφεια ἐκάλουν τὰ κυβευτήρια).

⁹⁷ Phot. σ 521. Σκίρον· τόπος Ἀθήνησιν, ἐφ' οὗ οἱ μάντιες ἐκαθέζοντο· καὶ Σκιράδος Ἀθηνᾶς ἱερὸν· καὶ ἡ ἑορτὴ Σκίρά· οὕτω Φερεκράτης. See also Hsch. σ 891 Σκειρόμαντις. On this memorial reconstruction see VESPA, in preparation.

history of Greek numeracy, which is characterized by the manipulation of counters and part of a larger semiotic system involving several contiguous activities, such as mathematics, games, and divination. The Krannon gravestone contributes to this complex cultural history at several levels.

First, the monument is exceptional because it lifts the anonymity of a mathematics teacher belonging to little known professionals who transmitted their knowledge mainly orally. Literary sources provide very few information about practical mathematics: how was it taught, by whom, what was its place in the Greek education system? Greek authors focus on “elite theoretical mathematics”,⁹⁸ though pebbles were a means to acquire the abstract properties of numbers. Despite the important role of mathematics, no other representation of a teacher is known,⁹⁹ apart from the Hellenistic relief of Ptolemaios *geometres* with the table of Pythagoras (Fig. 10). The Krannon funerary altar is also significant as it shows a teacher in action, performing elementary calculations on an abacus as well as more complex exercises with the semi-circle above the five lines.

Second, the monument reminds us that arithmetic could be ludic.¹⁰⁰ In Plato’s *Laws*, the Athenian underscores that mathematics should be taught since infancy in a pleasant way adapted to the age of the children. The training is not based on counters but on other objects providing a material dimension to calculation:

First, as regards counting, lessons have been invented for the merest infants to learn, by way of play and fun, modes of dividing up apples and chaplets, so that the same totals are adjusted to larger and smaller groups, and modes of sorting out boxers and wrestlers, in byes and pairs, taking them alternately or consecutively, in their natural order. Moreover,

⁹⁸ ASPER 2009, 107: “Recently, however, a consensus has emerged that Greek mathematics was heterogeneous and that the famous mathematicians are only the tip of an iceberg that must have consisted of several coexisting and partly overlapping.” On the two forms of mathematics, practical and theoretical, see e.g. Pl., *Phlb.*, 56 D 3–57 A 3. See also the overview of GAVIN – GENEQUAND 2021.

⁹⁹ NETZ 2002b; SIDOLI 2020, 190.

¹⁰⁰ According to NETZ 2002a, one should also consider theoretical mathematics as some form of game practiced in the upper circles of Athenian society. The 45 arithmetic riddles preserved in the *Anth. Pal.* 14, evidence the porosity between mathematical knowledge and play in the form of enigma; see KWAPISZ 2000 and GRANDOLINI 2006. More broadly on education, BETA 2020 and 2021, and in particular mathematical games and military education, MACÉ 2022. On this *longue durée* ludic tradition of problems to solve see the early medieval period *propositiones ad acuendos juvenes*, GAVIN – GENEQUAND 2021.

by way of play, the teachers mix together bowls made of gold, bronze, silver and the like, and others distribute them, as I said, by groups of a single kind, adapting the rules of elementary arithmetic to play.¹⁰¹

Boardgames could have been part of elementary education. As R. Netz and others noted, dice throws and moving the pieces also taught numerical skills.¹⁰² In the *Republic*, the Athenian contends that boardgames make for skilful children (*ikanoipaidēs*):

no one playing with pieces (*petteutikos*), or dice (*kubeutikos*), would become sufficiently competent, if he had treated it as a mere sideline and not practiced it since childhood?¹⁰³

The relationship between boardgames and mathematics is present in several platonic dialogues. In *Gorgias*, Socrates thus lists boardgames in the category of *technai* that structure the mind:

Socrates: But there is another class of arts (*technai*) which achieve their whole purpose through speech and—to put it roughly—require either no action to aid them, or very little; for example, numeration, calculation, geometry, playing with pieces (*petteia*), and many other arts (*technai*).¹⁰⁴

Like a new Palamedes, the child moving counters on the board invents a civilised order, made of lines, *grammai*, forming the structure of the board, letters as well as numbers.¹⁰⁵

When no numerical mark is visible, the size and the material modest, the design reduced to the basic five lines, were the boards used for counting or to play *Pente grammai*? We argue that both games and reckoning could be performed on this surface with a similar horizontal orientation, both for

¹⁰¹ Pl., *Leg.*, 819b-c (trans. R.G. Bury, Loeb). See also Pl., *Resp.*, 536a-537a.

¹⁰² NETZ 2002a, 342: “hence the relative ease with which they are analysed by computer programs. At a certain abstract level, the computer, the modern player and the ancient player, all display the same set of numerical skills.” See also BOUVIER 2020, 178-179.

¹⁰³ Pl., *Resp.*, 2.374c (trans. Chr. Emlyn-Jones, W. Preddy, Loeb).

¹⁰⁴ Pl., *Grg.*, 450d (trans. W.R.M. Lamb, Loeb): Ἐτεροι δὲ γέ εἰσι τῶν τεχνῶν αἱ διὰ λόγου πᾶν περαίνουσι, καὶ ἔργου, ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν, ἢ οὐδενὸς προσδέονται ἢ βραχέος πάνυ, οἷον ἡ ἀριθμητικὴ καὶ λογιστικὴ καὶ γεωμετρικὴ καὶ πεττευτικὴ γέ καὶ ἄλλαι πολλαὶ τέχναι.

¹⁰⁵ See the demonstration of BOUVIER 2020.

training as well as leisure. It could explain Heraclitus' alliterations in the first part of his enigmatic sentence: "Time is a child who moves counters to play" (αἰὼν παῖς ἐστὶ παίζων, πεσσεύων). The aim of the alliteration may not be rhetorical but to clarify that the child is moving pieces on a structured board to play, *paizôn*, not for calculating.¹⁰⁶

Finally, the scene displays the common fundamental cultural role of arithmetics and games, often neglected because of the oral transmission of both *technai*. The abacus and *Pente grammai* share a similar metaphoric value referring to civic and cosmic order. In the *Defense of Palamedes*, Gorgias (5th c. BC) lists the inventions credited to Palamedes, the Greek civilising hero who used his mantic power to interpret divine signs and provided instruments to organise human society:

[...] I am a great benefactor for you, both for the Greeks and for all humans, not for those now alive but for those yet to come. For who would have transformed human life from resourceless to resourceful, and from disordered to ordered, by inventing military formations, fundamental for victories, written laws, the guardians of justice, writing, an instrument of memory, measures and weights, resourceful means of exchange for commerce, number, the guardian of wealth, signal fires, the strongest and swiftest messengers, and *pesseia*, a painless way of passing leisure time?

τίς γὰρ ἂν ἐποίησε τὸν ἀνθρώπειον βίον πόριμον ἐξ ἀπόρου καὶ κεκοσμημένον ἐξ ἀκόσμου, τάξεις τε πολεμικὰς εὐρῶν μέγιστον εἰς πλεονεκτήματα, νόμους τε γραπτὸς φύλακας [τε] τοῦ δικαίου, γράμματά τε μνήμης ὄργανον, μέτρα τε καὶ σταθμὰ συναλλαγῶν εὐπόρους διαλλαγᾶς, ἀριθμὸν τε χρημάτων φύλακα, πυρσούς τε κρατίστους καὶ ταχίστους ἀγγέλους, πεσσοὺς τε σχολῆς ἄλυπον διατριβήν;¹⁰⁷

Marco Vespa demonstrated how these discoveries form a coherent semiotic system based on *σχήματα*, lines forming letters or numbers, and hence producing alphabet, mathematics, measures and weights, structuring the battle field, abaci as well as game boards.¹⁰⁸ The abacus on the

¹⁰⁶ On this polysemy, DASEN 2020.

¹⁰⁷ Gorg. fr. B 11a, 30 DK (trans. A. Laks, G.W. Most, Loeb, modified).

¹⁰⁸ For a detailed analysis of the literary sources, from Gorgias to Philostratus see VESPA 2020a.

Krannon relief embodies this enculturation system: the training of numerical competences is associated with learning the alphabet as a numeration system, while playing the *petteia* game introduces young players to social rules and to self-control, such as *agôn* and fair play.¹⁰⁹

Petteia games and abaci are of course cognitively distinct. The operation performed on the abacus only depends on the skill of the reckoner, while the results of games played with dice, like *Pente grammai*, are determined by aleatory throws beside the strategy of the players.¹¹⁰

Another difference between *petteia* and abaci is that a positive value has never been denied to mathematics, while games could be denounced as a moral and civic threat when turned into gambling for money. Alcidas' speech *Odysseus Against the Treachery of Palamedes*, thus accuses Palamedes of having invented money as well as *kubeia*, gambling, synonymous of excessive behaviour and waste:

And *kuboi*, in turn, he introduced as the greatest vice: pains and penalties for the losers, mockery and reproach for the winners. For the gains from *kuboi* are useless gains, and most are wasted immediately.

καὶ κύβους αὖ μέγιστον κακὸν κατέδειξε, τοῖς μὲν ἡττηθεῖσι λύπας καὶ ζημίας, τοῖς δὲ νενικηκόσι καταγέλωτα καὶ ὄνειδος. τὰ γὰρ ἀπὸ τῶν κύβων προσγιγνόμενα ἀνόνητα γίγνεται, τὰ δὲ πλεῖστα καταναλίσκεται παραχρῆμα.¹¹¹

The lively attitude of the boy beside the teacher is also significant: it is a visual code qualifying the expected young age of the teacher's student, and suggesting an enjoyable context. The meaning of the *melitê* dog on the relief completes an educational program. The animal participates actively to the visual construction of an ideal instruction. In ancient Greece, the joyful and affectionate relationship between this animal companion and young individuals was synonymous with introducing youths to another

¹⁰⁹ On these civic values, cf. HAMAYON 2015, 2021; DASEN 2015 and 2021.

¹¹⁰ On possible reckoning and board game on the same block see the slab with 6 lines and a numerical series beside two (*Polis?*) grids in Rhamnous, cf. SCHÄRLIG 2001a, 70-71, fig. 3.6.

¹¹¹ *Odysseus, Against the Treachery of Palamedes*, 27 (trans. KIDD 2017a, 129). On the social disorder generated by *kubeia*, gambling in a generic sense, see KIDD 2017b and VESPA 2020b. On the pre-monetary value of games, WENDLING 2015.

important range of social rules, such as those associated with taming as well as hunting.¹¹² On the five lines board, calculation training may have ended playfully with *Pente grammai*.¹¹³

Appendix: How to use the five-lines abacus from Krannon by Jérôme Gavin

This appendix aims to demonstrate how the four basic arithmetical operations could be performed on the Krannon abacus. If there is no Greek or Roman text explaining how to use an abacus, there is far more evidence in the Renaissance. In his monumental work, Barnard¹¹⁴ elaborates a classification of different counting methods with counters based on the analysis of 120 treatises (including different editions). This classification shows that if the mathematical background underwent little variation, the abacus' shape could vary greatly. Focusing only on the methods using a surface with lines, we note that in some methods the counters must only be placed on the lines. In others they must only be placed between the lines. But in the most common processes, the counters can be placed on or between the lines. To finish this quick overview in an exhaustive way, Barnard kept aside a fourth category for more complex processes.

By comparing these different techniques with the specificities of our five-line calculation surface and by using clues gathered throughout the ancient Greek world, we have developed a user's guide, according to the principle of calculation simplicity. Indeed, between two hypothetical calculation methods, one must, in the absence of concrete decisive elements, choose the simplest.

Representing a number

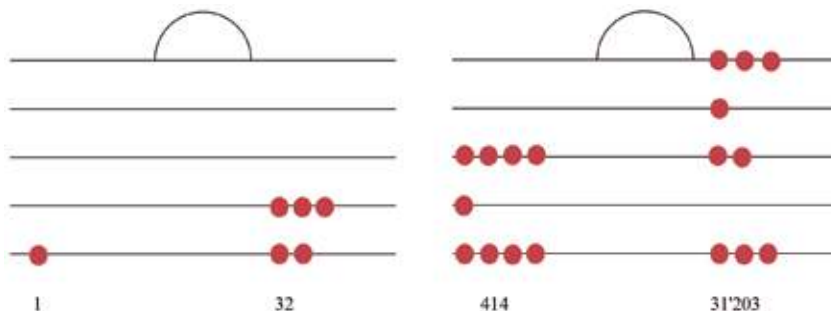
To represent a number on the abacus, we base ourselves on the five lines. Each line represents the five main denominations of the Greek numeration, namely 1, 10, 100, 1000 and 10'000. Each pebble placed on one of these lines represents one time the value of the line.

To avoid cluttering the abacus with too many pebbles on each row, we set as a rule that a pebble placed between two lines indicates five times the

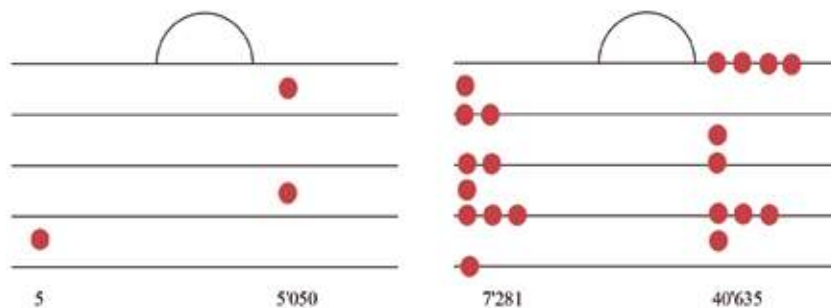
¹¹² VESPA 2019 and VESPA 2022, in press. See also SEIGLE 2018. In Rome, cf. BRADLEY 1998.

¹¹³ Cf. the similar conclusion of G. Bakewell in this volume on the alternance of games and logic, dialectic, and mathematic exercises in Plato's Academy.

¹¹⁴ BARNARD 1916, 254.



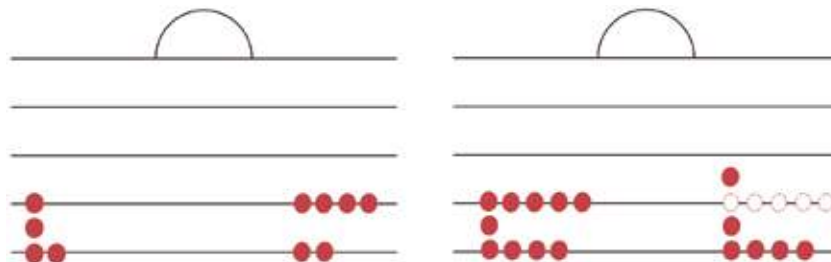
value of the line below. Thanks to this, we can represent any number on the abacus in a simplified or reduced way.



Showing a number on the abacus is thus intuitive and only requires a basic training.

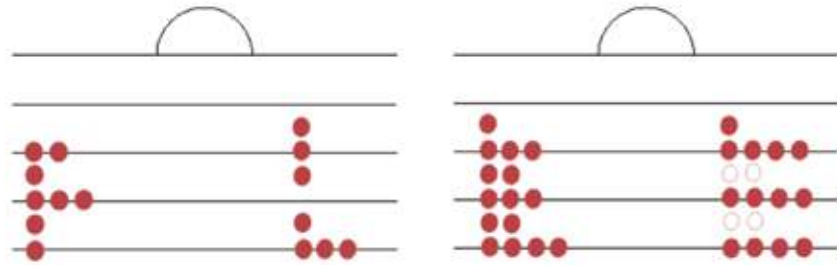
Addition

To add 17 and 42, we start by plotting the two numbers on either side of the abacus. To find the sum, simply slide the pebbles together. If necessary, reduce the numbers to get a smaller result.



On the left of the first abacus, we have the number 17 and on the right 42. On the left of the second abacus, we have the result of the addition (59) in non-reduced form and on the right in reduced form.

To add 286 and 658, we proceed in the same way.



On the left side of the first abacus, we have the number 286 and on the right 658.

On the left of the second chart, we have the result of the addition (944) in unreduced form and on the right in the simplified form.

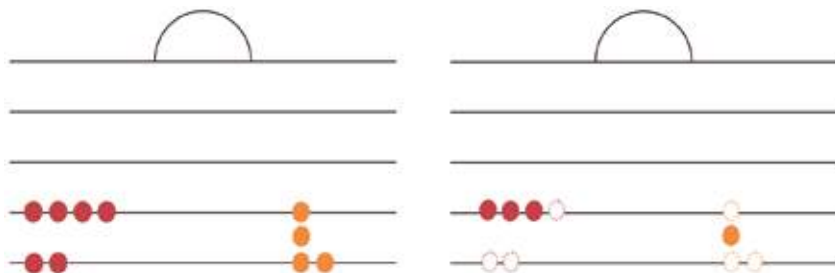
The simplicity and efficiency of the process explains why it took centuries for written calculation to become the standard in the West. One also becomes aware of the physical aspect of the calculation. As R. Netz summed it up: “We imagine numbers as an entity seen on the page; the Greeks imagined them as an entity grasped between the thumb and the finger”.¹¹⁵

In order to understand ancient calculation, one must put aside our own reality which consists in using the same system to record numbers and perform calculations. Numerical calculation was done with pebbles, while recording the result was done differently.

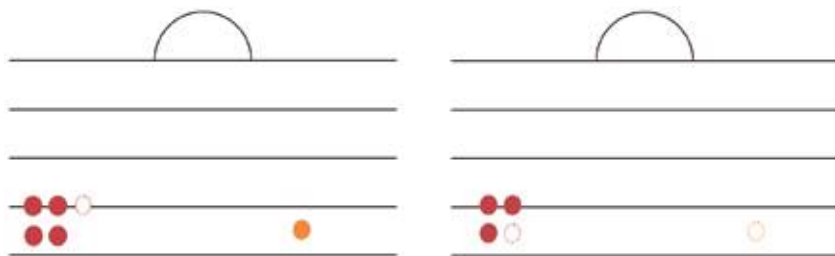
Subtraction

To subtract 17 from 42, we start by plotting the two numbers on either side of the abacus. To find the difference, we must remove the smaller number from the larger one. In the abacus system, we must remove from the larger number, the pebbles corresponding to the smaller number. To do this, we start by removing simultaneously the pebbles that have the same values.

¹¹⁵ NETZ 2002a, 329.

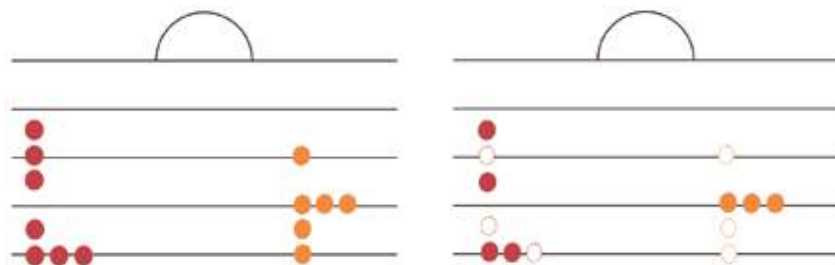


All that is left to do is to remove the last pebble that has no equivalent for the moment. To do this, we transform a pebble of a higher value into pebbles of a lower value. Here, we transform 10 in two steps.

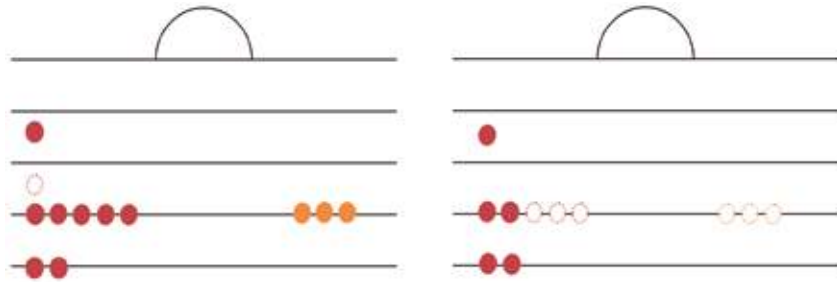


The result is 25.

To subtract 136 from 658, we proceed in a similar way by first removing simultaneously the pebbles which have the same value.



We then remove the three pebbles that have no equivalent for the moment. In order to do this, we transform a pebble of a higher value into pebbles of a lower value. Here, we transform 50 into five times 10.



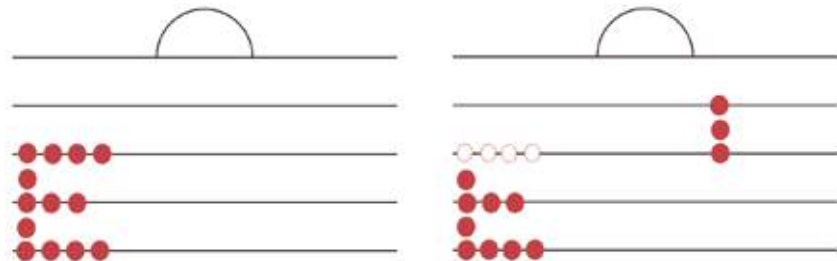
The result is 522.

Multiplication

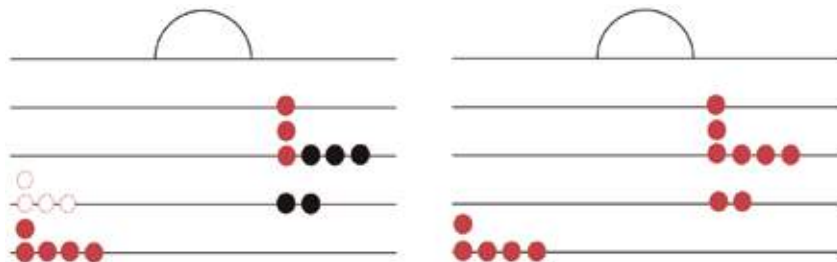
To multiply 489 by 4, first place 489 on the abacus.

Then we multiply the 4 hundreds by 4, which equals 16 hundreds that we place on the right side of the abacus.

Once the hundreds have been multiplied, they can be removed from the left side of the abacus.

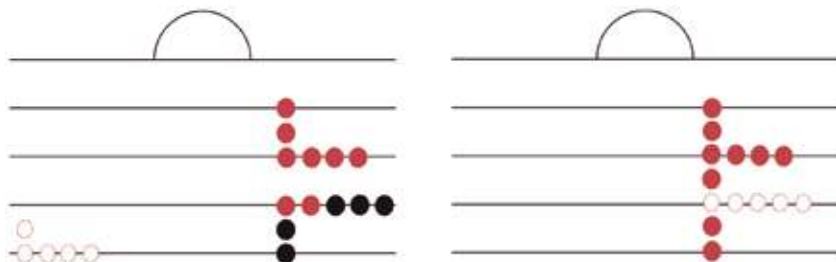


Then we multiply the 8 tens by 4, which equals 32 tens (represented in black) that we add to the right. Now that the tens have been multiplied, they can be removed from the left part of the abacus. Reductions are made if necessary.



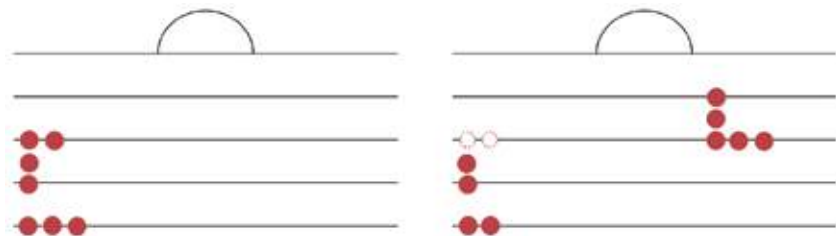
The 9 units are then multiplied by 4, giving 36 units (shown in black) which are added to the right. Once the units are multiplied, they can be removed from the left side of the chart.

Reductions are made if necessary and the result is read off the right side.



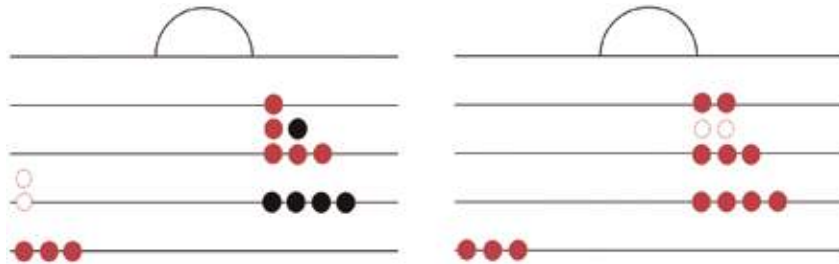
The result is 1956.

To multiply 263 by 9, we place 263 on the abacus. Then we multiply the 2 hundreds by 9, which equals 18 hundreds that we place on the right side of the abacus. Once the hundreds are multiplied, they can be removed from the left side of the abacus.



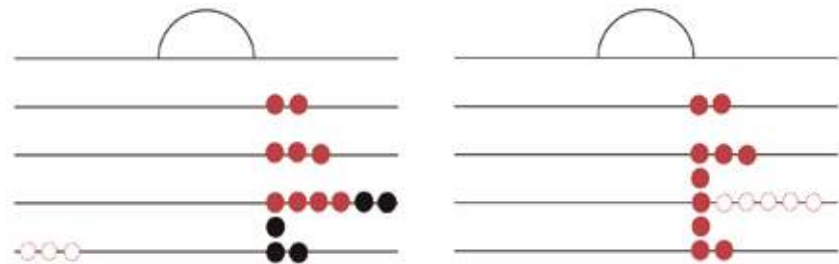
We then multiply the 6 tens by 9, which equals 54 tens (represented in black) that we add to the right. Once the tens are multiplied, we can remove them from the left part of the abacus.

Reductions are made if necessary.



The 3 units are then multiplied by 9, for a total of 27 units (shown in black) that are added to the right. Once the units are multiplied, they can be removed from the left side of the chart.

Reductions are made if necessary and the result is read off the right side.



The result is 2367.

This procedure is based on the knowledge gathered from the multiplication table attested on the Geneva relief (fig. 10) and in the works of Aristotle. It also implements a kind of long-lasting distributivity since it is also found in Eutocius of Ascalon (5th century AD).¹¹⁶

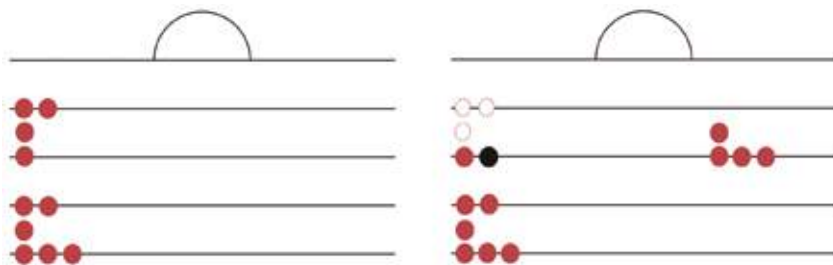
In the case of a multiplication by 70, one multiplies by 7 first, which is easy, then by 10, which is even easier. By extension in the case of a multiplication by 72, one multiplies by 7, by 10 and then by 2.

Division

To divide 2628 by 3, we start by placing 2628 on the abacus. The division of 2 thousands by 3 is not possible, so we go to the 26 hundreds.

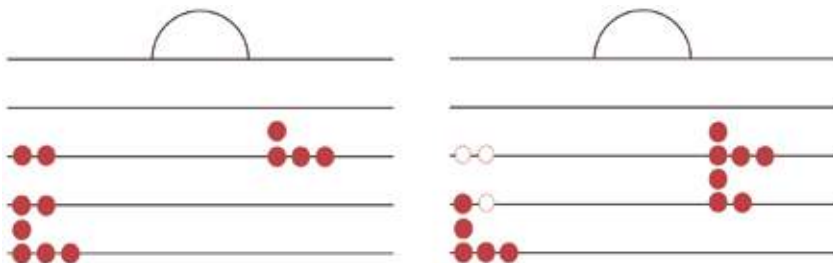
¹¹⁶ More about this system in GAVIN – SCHÄRLIG 2018.

26 hundreds divided by 3 equals 8 hundreds with a remainder of 2 hundreds.



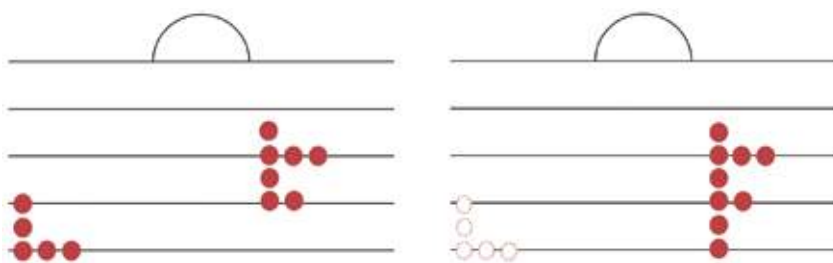
We then move to the tens.

22 tens divided by 3 makes 7 tens with a remainder of 1 ten.



Lastly, we go to the units (18).

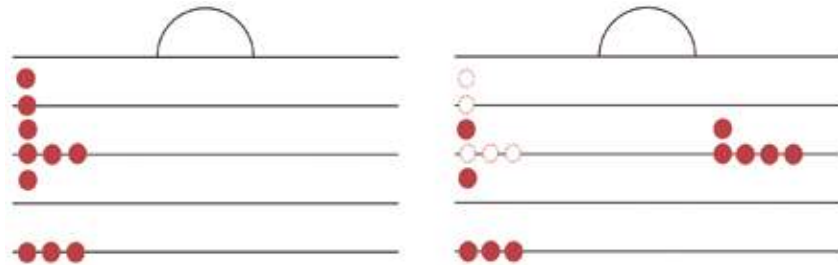
18 units divided by 3 makes 6 units without remainder.



The result is 876.

To divide 6853 by 7, we start by putting 6853 on the abacus.

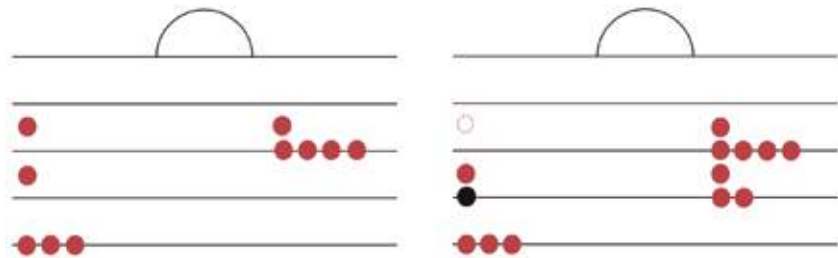
The division of 6 thousands by 7 is not possible, so we move to the hundreds (68).



68 hundreds divided by 7 equals 9 hundreds with a remainder of 5 hundreds.

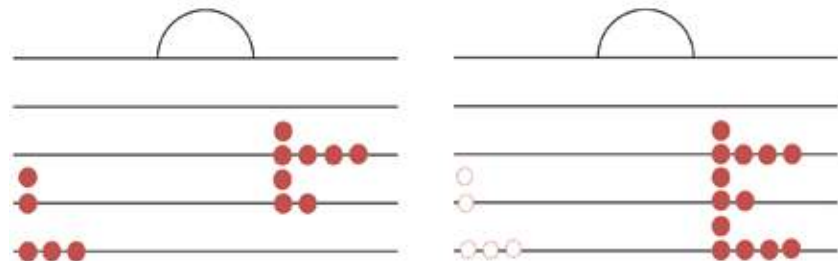
Then we go to the tens (55).

55 tens divided by 7 equals 7 tens with a remainder of 6 tens.



Then we go to the units (63).

63 units divided by 7 equals 9 units without a remainder.



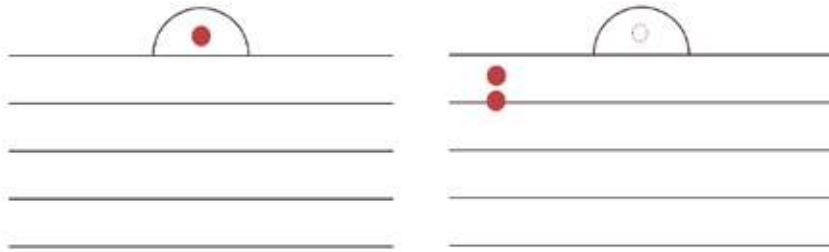
The result is 979.

This process is very efficient with a smaller divisor than 10, but it is much more laborious when the divisor is bigger.

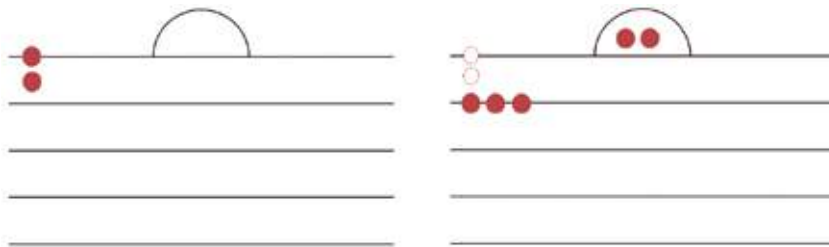
Using the semi-circle

As explained in the article, our hypothesis concerning the semi-circle is that it constituted an intermediate exchange zone in order to manage in a simple way the singularity represented by the talent.

Thus, a counter placed inside the semicircle represented a talent before being transformed into drachmae.



We see that the talent placed in the intermediate zone is easily transformed visually into 6000 drachmae.



Here we see how 15'000 drachmae become 2 talents and 3000 drachmae.

Thus, with five simple lines and a few counters, one can perform all the elementary operations of arithmetic in an efficient way. Such simplicity to support human resourcefulness: what a great lesson for mankind.

Illustrations

Fig. 1. Marble funerary altar, from Krannon (H. 78.6 cm, W. 54/58 cm, D. 41/55 cm). Diachronic Museum of Larissa. Photo courtesy Larissa Museum.

Fig. 2. Attic black-figure amphora (H. 49.5 cm). Essen, Museum Folkwang A176/K1049. © Museum Folkwang Essen/Artothek.

Fig. 3. Attic black-figure lekythos (H. 14 cm). Paris, Louvre MNB 911. Photo Marie-Lan Nguyen. Creative Commons license.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Achilles_Ajax_dice_Louvre_MNB911_n2.jpg.

Fig. 4. Attic black-figure amphora, once in Florence. After BUCHHOLZ 1987, no. 106, fig. 56a.

Fig. 5. Attic black-figure pelike (H. 36 cm), private collection. After LEIPEN 1984, 11.

Fig. 6. Attic black-figure kyathos (H. 14.7 cm). Brussels, Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire R2512. Photo Museum.

Fig. 7. Attic terracotta model of gaming table (12 x 37 cm), from Attica? Copenhagen, National Museum 1950. After USSING 1884, pl. 1.

Fig. 8. Bronze Etruscan mirror (H. 35 cm). Collezione Giulio Sambon, inv. Sambon 439, ST. 1753. In deposito presso Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio della città metropolitana di Milano. After G. Körte, *Etruskische Spiegel*, V, Berlin, 1897, pl. 109.

Fig. 9. Marble relief (H. 67 cm, L. 83 cm, Th. 7.5 cm). Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin- Preussischer Kulturbesitz Sk 804. Photo Johannes Laurentius.

Fig. 10. Marble stela (H. 77 cm, L. 48.4 cm, Th. 10.5 cm). Geneva, MAH Musée d'art et d'histoire, Ville de Genève 27937. © Musée d'art et d'histoire, Ville de Genève, photographer Flora Bevilacqua.

Fig. 11. Marble abacus (L. 127 cm, W. 78 cm, Th. 8.5 cm, 215 kg), from Oropos, Amphiaraiion. Line drawing Alain Schärli.

Fig. 12. Etruscan carnelian gem (H. 1 cm, l. 0.9 cm). Paris, Cabinet des Médailles 58.1898. Photo Serge Oboukhoff © BnF-CNRS-MSH Mondes.

Fig. 13. Red-figure italiote crater (H. 130 cm). Naples, National Museum 3253 (81947). Photo courtesy Naples National Museum.

Fig. 14. Marble slab (reused stela?) (30 x 47.5 x 8 cm), from Eretria, western gate. Eretria Museum M 785. Photo courtesy of the Swiss School of Archaeology in Greece, Andreas Skiadaressis.

Fig. 15. Frontispiece of Libri IIII Arithmetice Speculative, Gregor Reisch, *Margarita Philosophica*, Freiburg, 1503.

Fig. 16. Frontispiece of Jakob Köbel, *Ain new geordnet Rechenbiechlin auf den linien mit Rechen pfeningen*, Augsburg, 1514.

Fig. 17. Frontispiece of Adam Ries, *Rechnung auff der linihen und federn*, Frankfurt, 1560.

Fig. 18. Lucanian bell-krater (H. 26.3 cm). Princeton, Princeton University Art Museum y1986-33. © Photo Museum.

Abbreviations

BAPD = Beazley Archive Pottery Database <https://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/carc/pottery>

CAT = CLAIRMONT Ch. W. 1993. *Classical Attic Tombstones*, Kilchberg.

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The knucklebone and the goose. Playing and jeopardy for the boy of Lilaia

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Abstract. A particularly beautiful marble statue of a boy, a dedication unearthed in Lilaia, Phokis, and on display in the National Archaeological Museum, Athens, is an opportunity for us to explore the connection between the boys' games and the jeopardy in their outcome. Both the expression on the boy's face and the way he holds an astragal and a goose demand multiple levels of reading. These are related to the intent of the dedication in the first place, the identification of the games requiring an astragal or involving a goose, as well as to the choice of these specific playthings for the particular imagery. Why is he holding a single astragal, and in such a particular way? Why is the goose included in the picture, and what species of *Anatidae* is this? The apparent originality of the motif and of the work, in comparison with other well-known Hellenistic representations in stone or terracotta, dictated our research into the milieu of artistic and symbolic quests of that period,

and also a reflection on the choice of the artist to designate a child as the owner of the playthings within a particular spatial and temporal context, perhaps associated with healing from a life-threatening fever.

Boy, goose, astragal, game, divination, healing, children's statues

Περίληψη. Ένα εξαιρετικά όμορφο μαρμάρινο άγαλμα ενός αγοριού, ένα ανάθημα που αποκαλύφθηκε στη Λιλαία της Φωκίδας και εκτίθεται στο Εθνικό Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο Αθηνών, αποτελεί ευκαιρία για να διερευνήσουμε τη σχέση μεταξύ των αγορίστικων παιχνιδιών και του κινδύνου στην έκβασή τους. Τόσο η έκφραση στο πρόσωπο του αγοριού όσο και ο τρόπος που κρατάει έναν αστράγαλο και μια χήνα απαιτούν πολλαπλά επίπεδα ανάγνωσης. Αυτά σχετίζονται με την αρχική πρόθεση της αφιέρωσης, τον προσδιορισμό των παιχνιδιών που προϋποθέτουν χρήση αστραγάλου ή περιλαμβάνουν μία χήνα, καθώς και την επιλογή των συγκεκριμένων παιχνιδιών για αυτή την ιδιαίτερη απεικόνιση. Γιατί κρατά μόνο έναν αστράγαλο και μάλιστα με έναν τόσο ιδιόζοντα τρόπο; Γιατί η χήνα εμπεριέχεται στην εικόνα και σε ποιο είδος νησιδίων ανήκει; Η εμφανής πρωτοτυπία του θέματος και του έργου σε σύγκριση με άλλες γνωστές ελληνιστικές απεικονίσεις σε λίθο ή πηλό, έστρεψε την έρευνά μας στο περιβάλλον των καλλιτεχνικών και συμβολικών αναζητήσεων αυτής της περιόδου, και τον προβληματισμό μας στην επιλογή του καλλιτέχνη να καθορίσει ένα παιδί ως ιδιοκτήτη των παιχνιδιών μέσα σε ένα συγκεκριμένο χωροχρονικό πλαίσιο, ενδεχομένως συνδεδεμένο με την ίαση από έναν απειλητικό πυρετό.

Αγόρι, χήνα, αστράγαλος, παιχνίδι, μαντική, ίασις, αγάλματα παιδιών

Riassunto. Una bella statua marmorea di fanciullo, un'offerta votiva rinvenuta a Lilaia, nella Focide, ed attualmente esposta al Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Atene, offre lo spunto per esplorare la connessione tra i giochi di fanciulli e la pericolosità del loro risultato. Sia l'espressione sul volto del ragazzo che il modo in cui tiene un astragalo ed un'oca richiedono molteplici livelli di lettura che riguardano l'intento della dedica, l'identificazione dei giochi che richiedono un astragalo o che coinvolgono un'oca, oltre che la scelta di questi giocattoli specifici per questo particolare soggetto iconografico. Perché il fanciullo tiene un solo astragalo e in un modo così particolare? Perché l'oca è inclusa nell'immagine e di quale specie di anatidi si tratta? L'apparente originalità del motivo e dell'opera, rispetto ad altre ben note rappresentazioni ellenistiche in pietra o terracotta, ha diretto la nostra ricerca nel *milieu* delle istanze artistiche e simboliche di quel periodo ed indotto una riflessione sulla scelta dell'artista di designare un bambino come proprietario dei giocattoli, in un particolare contesto spaziale e temporale, forse associato alla guarigione da una febbre minacciosa per la sua vita.

Fanciullo, oca, astragalo, gioco, divinazione, guarigione, statue infantili

1. The site and the excavation

The statue presented here (Fig. 1)¹ was found in 1857 on the north slope of Parnassos – in the region of Lilaia, the city of ancient Phocis. It was unearthed 1 km to the East of the ancient city, near the sources of the Kephissos river, at the site of Agia Eleousa, within ruins of a retaining wall and, on the rock below that, of a small rectangular building.² As the excavation of the retaining wall has been very complex due to the superposition of many layers of constructions, the statue appears to have been an isolated find. In the past, the boy statue had been associated to an inscribed base found there,³ but this connection can now be safely rejected.⁴ All characteristics indicate provenance from the sanctuary of a kourotrophic deity situated next to a water source, perhaps the one sacred to the Nymphs and to the River Kephissos, an identification already suggested by Ioannis Svoronos and discussed by Hilde Rühfel.⁵



Fig. 1

* The authors extend sincere thanks to Bernard Holtzmann for his valuable remarks which helped us to address the arising issues in a more effective way (the errors are ours), and to Irini Poupaki for the Appendix at the end of this paper.

¹ Athens, National Archaeological Museum 2772.

² Dimensions of the building: 3,5 x 10,5 x 13,5 m. See DASSIOS 2004, 67-68.

³ DASSIOS 1992; DASSIOS 2004, 67-68.

⁴ The base was holding the dedication of a boy statue, Andriskos, to the river Kephissos, by (the parents (?) Xenophanes and Xenodora (ΞΕΝΟΦΑΝΗΣ/ΞΕΝΟΔΩΡΑ/ΑΝΔΡΙΣΚΟΝ/ΚΗΦΙΣΣΩΙ); *Inscriptiones Graeciae Septentrionis*, 60, no. 232; SVORONOS 1909, 170. However, a drawing of the base by the traveller Lolling in 1887, recently published by PIPERAS 2011, 63, shows that a connection of the base to our statue is impossible because the recess on the upper surface of the base could not accommodate the statue plinth. The latter is articulated in a rectangle corresponding to the boy, continuous with an oval corresponding to the pillar. The recess is similarly articulated but reversed. Thus, should the plinth be placed on the base, the inscription would appear on the back side of the base. This could be explained by the employment of the base in second use, but in that case the identification of the boy Andriskos to our statue would not apply any more.

⁵ RÜHFEL 1984, 227, n. 167.

The cult of Kephissos as a sacred river originating in Lilaia, a city described by Pausanias,⁶ is already found in the Homeric *Iliad*.⁷ Pausanias mentions baths, perhaps with healing qualities, the sanctuaries of Apollo, of Artemis, and of the Naiad Nymphs, as Lilaia is a city named after the homonymous Nymph thought to have been the daughter of Kephissos. The river waters are described as surfacing at midday, making a formidable noise like the roaring of a bull. Pausanias also mentions a number of votive statues produced in Attica in Pentelic marble and dedicated in the sanctuaries, a fact corroborated by the architectural, epigraphical and sculptural findings.

2. The statue

The statue represents a chubby, nude, smiling young boy, four to seven years old,⁸ standing frontally next to a square pillar (Fig. 1).⁹ It is made of Parian marble, appreciated by the Greeks during this period as much as the Pentelic one (see Appendix). The boy is standing on his right leg and is crossing his left in front of the right, sharing the same plinth with the pillar. His left arm is stretched with the palm flexed to immobilize a bird (duck or goose) sitting on the top of the pillar. He is bending his right lower arm horizontally below his chest and has the fingers bent to enclose a knucklebone. Some abrasions are to be seen on the right-hand fingers. He inclines his head to his right, at the same time bending it three quarters towards his lower left to gaze at the bird. Above his forehead and on his short hair he wears a pedimental diadem (στεφάνη). The statue and the pillar are connected at the back through a visible horizontal element. The back of the figure is finished but the back of the pillar is not. Though the figure of the boy is frontal with the gaze turned to the bird, the pillar stands at an

⁶ Paus. 10.33.4-5: Ἔστι δὲ ἐν Λιλαίᾳ θέατρον καὶ ἀγορὰ τε καὶ λουτρά· ἔστι δὲ καὶ θεῶν ἱερὰ Ἀπόλλωνος, τὸ δὲ Ἀρτέμιδος· ἀγάλματα δὲ ὀρθὰ ἐργασίας τε τῆς Ἀττικῆς καὶ τῆς Πεντελῆσι λιθοτομίας. Λίλαιαν δὲ τῶν καλουμένων Ναϊδῶν καὶ θυγατέρα εἶναι τοῦ Κηφισοῦ καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς νόμφης τὸ ὄνομα τεθῆναι τῇ πόλει φασί. Καὶ ὁ ποταμὸς ἐνταῦθα ἔχει τὰς πηγάς· ἀνεῖσι δὲ ἐκ τῆς γῆς οὐ τὰ πάντα μεθ' ἡσυχίας, ἀλλ' ὡς τὰ πλείω συμβαίνειν μεσοῦσης μάλιστα τῆς ἡμέρας παρέχεται φωνὴν ἀνερχόμενος· εἰκάσαις ἂν μυκωμένῳ ταύρῳ τὸν ἦχον τοῦ ὕδατος.

⁷ Hom., *Il.*, 2.522-523: οἱ τ' ἄρα πᾶρ ποταμὸν Κηφισόν διον ἔναιον, οἱ τε Λίλαιαν ἔχον πηγῆς ἐπὶ Κηφισοῖο, "and that lived beside the goodly river Cephissus, and that held Lilaia by the springs of Cephissus..." (trans. A.T. Murray, Loeb).

⁸ RÜHFEL 1984, 227-230, 241, pl. 95.

⁹ Some parts of the statue, like the upper part of the head and the feet, were broken and reattached; the body of the bird was also broken in two pieces and reattached to the pillar.

angle, slightly turned three-quarter to the left, perhaps suggesting that the backside of the work's right part was not intended to be visible; thus, there was no need for the sculptor to finish the back. Or is it a question of perspective corresponding to a pre-existing model as we will see below?

Several scholars have discussed this work of art, and there is general consensus on a dating in the early 3rd century BC.¹⁰ The statue belongs to a well-known group of marble and terracotta representations of children, mostly boys, younger or older, holding or accompanying birds, such as roosters, ducks and geese. They date from the 4th century to the end of the Hellenistic period and have often been copied in the Roman period.¹¹



Fig. 2

They originate mostly from votive or burial context, in the second case in the form of *stelai*,¹² statuettes, figurines¹³ and sometimes also funerary scenes depicted on vases.¹⁴

In Greek sculpture, the theme of the child and a goose or duck is especially well documented since the end of the 5th century¹⁵ and through the Hellenistic period. The child can be seated as a “temple boy” playing with the bird as the one from Ismaros, Thrace,¹⁶ or holding it in his

¹⁰ SVORONOS 1909, col. 139-156, pl. 5; CAROUZOU 1968, 179-180, pl. 63; VIERNEISEL-SCHLÖRB, II, 1979; RÜHFEL 1984, 227-230, pl. 95, no. 167; RAFTOPOULOU 2000, cat. no. 40, 69-71, pls. 72-73; BOBOU 2015, cat. no. 80; CHANIOTIS *et alii* 2017, cat. No. 28 (IGNATIADOU).

¹¹ RIDGWAY 2001, 338, on genre figures of children. See also RIDGWAY 2006; RÜHFEL 1984, 225-230; BEAUMONT 2012.

¹² Stele of Plangon, Munich, Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek G1 199.

¹³ Terracotta figurine of a boy accompanied by a goose; ACHEILARA 2006, vol. I, 82, vol. II cat. no. 1027.

¹⁴ Prothesis scene of young boy with goose: Attic white lekythos by the Triglyph Painter, ca. 410 BC. Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon E 288-3 (following OAKLEY 2004, 83, figs. 52-53).

¹⁵ SVORONOS 1909, 134-135; MACHAIRA 2011.

¹⁶ Kavala, Archaeological Museum of Kavala (H 13.1 cm), 3rd c. BC.

hand as the figurine of Eros from Nikisiani does (Fig. 2).¹⁷ A girl can also hold a goose in her hands like the one dedicated in the sanctuary of Asclepios in Chania, similar to others exhibited in the Museum of Chania.¹⁸ However, the most famous type is that of the boy shown strangling the goose,¹⁹ in accordance with the *Mimes* (Μίμοι or Μιμίαμβοι) written by the Alexandrian poet Herodas or Herondas, who mentioned such a statue, erected in the Asclepieion of Cos, and viewed by two women worshipers who were impressed by “[...] how the boy strangles the goose”.²⁰ Pliny the Elder attributed the same or a similar statue to an original of Boethos of Carthage in the 4th century.²¹

In contrast to the above violent scenes (articulated in pyramidal form)²² showing boys strangling geese, the boy of Lilaia is a smiling boy with a peaceful face. He is standing frontally, according to the Polycletean rules on the antithetical movement of the legs (χιασμός), and accentuated by Praxitelean influences of the middle 4th century. This stance is well attested in funerary reliefs of the last quarter of the 4th century.²³ The raised left arm and shoulder appear natural, as the pose is justified by the hand firmly holding the bird. It is original as it differs from other renderings of the same subject, and the gesture counterbalances the raised right side of the child’s pelvis. The inclined head of the boy is seen also in two bronze statuettes of boys from Dodona attributed to Attic manufacture

¹⁷ ADAM-VELENI *et alii* 2017, 350, cat. no. 394 (MALAMIDOU).

¹⁸ Chania, Archaeological Museum L 246; L 193; ΠΑΡΑΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΟΥ 1982, figs. 3, 5-6; MACHAIRA 2011, L 246, 446, fig. 6.

¹⁹ SCHOLLMAYER 2003; KUNZE 2002, 149, no. 828; KUNZE 2002, 143, no. 792. The Munich group is known in eleven or twelve copies of the Roman Period. The main ones are: Munich, Glyptothek 268; Paris, Louvre 40; Vatican Gall., Cand. IV 66, Genève, Musée d’art et d’histoire 8944; Rome, Museo Capitolino 238; Rome, Museo Torlonia; Rome, Museo Nazionale 8565bis, Paris, Musée Rodin 357; Naples, Museo Nazionale 120581.

²⁰ Herod. 4.30-35: Κυννώ: ἃ πρὸς Μοιρέων, τὴν χηναλώπεκα ὡς τὸ παιδίον πνίγει πρὸ τῶν ποδῶν γούν, εἴ τι μὴ λίθος, τούργον, ἐρεῖς, λαλήσει. μᾶ, χρόνον κοτ’ ὄνθρωποι κῆς τοῦς λίθους ἔξουσι τὴν ζῶν θεῖναι. ARCHONTIDOU – ACHEILARA 1999, 37, on terracotta figurine from a grave in Mytilini showing a boy crowned for an official event.

²¹ Plin., *HN*, 34.84: *Boëthi, quamquam argento melioris, infans eximium anserem strangulat*. Other readings have been suggested instead of *eximium* (*sex anno / annis, eximie / eximiae*, etc). Boethos is mentioned among sculptors who worked with metal.

²² E.g., “Der Ganswürger”, marble copy following a bronze original of 230 BC; Munich, Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek Gl. 268.

²³ ROLLEY 1999, fig. 283 (Stele of Ilissos, Athens, NAM 869, 340-330 BC); fig. 284 (Stele of Kerameikos, Athens, NAM 871, 340-330 BC); KALTSAS 2002, 382, 193; KALTSAS 2002, 385 (Athens NAM 871, third quarter of 4th c. BC).



Fig. 3 a-b

(Fig. 3 a-b), and in some children's marble statues from the sanctuary of Brauron.²⁴ The crowning with the *stephane* may indicate the celebration of a festival (εορτή) or of a solemn day during a rite of passage. To this notion contributes the rendering of very short hair, probably freshly cut and offered to the local deities venerated in the sanctuary the statue had been dedicated to.²⁵ The boy's face with marked eyelids is illuminated by a beautiful smile as in the head of a boy from the Artemis sanctuary in Brauron.²⁶ A confiscated terracotta figurine also kept at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens presents the same characteristics as the body – like the corpulence and the disposure of the limbs – as well

²⁴ RIDGWAY 2001, 338, pls. 175-176.

²⁵ River Kephissos and the Naiad Nymphs during a socialization celebration as it happened by the Athenian Kephissos: Pausanias mentions two statues, one of Mnesimache and another one of her son who dedicated his hair to the river (Paus. 1.37.3: ἀγάλματα δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ ποταμῷ Μνησιμάχης, τὸ δὲ ἕτερον ἀνάθημα κειρομένου οἱ τὴν κόμην τοῦ παιδὸς ἔστι τῷ Κηφισῷ). There was also a special day called *Koureotis* ("cutting of the hair") concerning the young and perhaps very young people during the festival of the *Apatouria* in the Athenian and the Ionian societies: DEUBNER 1966, 232-234; SEIFERT 2011; about hair dedication see also *Anthol. Pal.* 6.155; 6.278; 7.482.

²⁶ Discussed by RÜHFEL 1984, ch. IV n. 169; see also DAUX 1959, pl. 25 in the middle; THEMELIS 1971, pl. 67.



Figs. 4-5

as similarities to the face of the boy (Fig. 4). The type does not appear in terracotta and the figurine is rather not genuine but it indicates the existence of a (marble?) original that has been copied in clay to create a “rare find” for the art market. From the sanctuary of Brauron originates also a small marble statue which can be seen as a parallel to our find (Fig. 5).²⁷ It shows a boy, nude excluding the *chlamys* fastened on his right shoulder, also standing next to a pillar on which he probably held a duck; although the right arm is missing today, the gesture seems to be the same as the one made by the boy of Lilaia. The group appears reversed left to right in comparison to the Lilaia one. There are differences: the legs are not crossed and he is not holding a knucklebone, he is older, but the subject is clearly the same. That statuette, from before the abandonment of the sanctuary in the late 4th-early 3rd century BC, also verifies the dating of our find, which postdates the Brauron one only slightly. From the sanctuary in Soros, Thessaly, there is a similar contemporary statuette with the pillar under the right hand and the goose held with the left, although there the legs are not crossed either.²⁸

The finds share a very interesting detail: the pillar is placed slightly obliquely on the plinth, thus creating a kind of perspective, which is not

²⁷ Brauron, Archaeological Museum 1241.

²⁸ Archaeological Museum of Volos. RÜHFEL 1984, ch. IV, n. 172; VORSTER 1983, 159, 360 no. 86, design no. 6. LEVENTI 2009, p. 297 pl. 6, n. 15, and concerning the dedication of this kind of children’s statues in sanctuaries of kourotrophic deities p. 298 n.22.

necessary in the case of a three-dimensional statue. This leads to the identification of a two-dimensional original, probably a painting or a relief. The adaptation created the need for a horizontal tenon connecting the statue to the pillar, and also probably explains why the back side of the pillar remained unfinished.

Two more statues of boys have been found in Crete, the first one is holding the duck in his right hand,²⁹ the other one holds the duck in his left hand, with his himation serving as a kind of pillar.³⁰

3. The knucklebone

The peculiarity of our statue is not limited to the fact that the boy has the goose under control, as this happens also in other cases.³¹ In the cavity of his right hand, the boy also holds a horizontally placed knucklebone like the well-known temple boy from the Lissos Asclepieion.³² The surfaces of hand and knucklebone show only a slight difference in depth, with the long side of the knucklebone appearing as a raised edge inside the hand (Fig. 6). This is an important element as one might think that the material contained in the hand could only be the remains of the material that the sculptor was not able to carefully take away. The rendering of the fingers and the material left between the right hand and the body testify to a not so skilful work, unlike that on the face of the boy. The forefinger is tightly bent around the curvature of the knucklebone and the tip of the finger is broken. As the statue was most probably painted in antiquity, the knucklebone would have normally been rendered in a bright colour like red, blue, yellow or even golden to imitate metal, which would have enhanced the plaything's presence. This feature had gone unnoticed until the find was recently re-examined. This observation³³ creates new perspectives towards the interpretation of the statue and may also be useful for the identification of other knucklebones held by children in statuary. This must be also the case of the little bronze statuette of a boy from the sanctuary of Dodona holding in his right hand a ball that he is ready to throw and in

²⁹ Archaeological Museum of Chania 84. PΑΡΑΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΟΥ 1981.

³⁰ Archaeological Museum of Rethymnon 87. PΑΡΑΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΟΥ 1981.

³¹ Archaeological Museum of Chania 249. PΑΡΑΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΟΥ 1982; MACHAIRA 2011, fig. 7.

³² Archaeological Museum of Chania 253. PΑΡΑΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΟΥ 1981, fig. 2; MACHAIRA 2011, fig. 5.

³³ By D. Ignatiadou, on the occasion of its loan to the *Emotions* exhibition; see CHANIOTIS *et alii* 2017, cat. no. 28.



Fig. 6

his left hand a to-date non-identified knucklebone (Fig. 3b: middle 2nd c. BC).³⁴ A small research showed that at least one other statue in the collection of the National Archaeological Museum preserves the same feature. From the Eileithya sanctuary by the Ilissos in Athens, a standing girl carrying a hare holds a knucklebone in her closed right palm crossed

over her chest (Fig. 7 a, b).³⁵ In a similar manner a statuette hand kept in Geneva, holds two knucklebones.³⁶

Anatomically, the knucklebone/astragal is a small bone in the ankle of the back feet of (by) cloven-hoofed animals (διχάλωτά).³⁷ These are the originally milk producing animals, later also grown for their meat, therefore the first domesticated ones (excluding the *Cervidae*, which man chose not to domesticate).³⁸ The knucklebone allows these animals to flex the foot³⁹ and thus, to jump, to run and to climb by using their front legs as “hands’ allowing them to stand in an approximate “upright position”⁴⁰; that is why it symbolizes these animals, especially goats. The knucklebone form differs from one animal to the other, so people in animal-farming societies were able to distinguish knucklebones from a very young age and to identify the pertaining animal and its age, old or young. The kourotrophic aspect of Artemis, who protected the growing up of children, was extended to all these animals.⁴¹ Additionally, Pan and the Nymphs, Hera in Samos, and Kephissos had similar aspects. Callimachus’ phrase: (“[the child] raised on its own ankles / stood upright” ([...] ἐπί σφυρόν ὀρθόν ἀνέστη) refers to young children as well as to young animals, thus

³⁴ RÜHFEL 1984, n. 173 with bibliography; DASEN 2020, 108-109, fig. 4; PAPAICONOMOU (2019 in press).

³⁵ Athens, National Archaeological Museum 694; see KALTSAS 2002, cat. no. 559.

³⁶ Geneva, Musée d’art et d’histoire P 877; see BOBOU 2015, cat. no. 68.

³⁷ Arist., *Hist. an.*, 499b15.

³⁸ POPLIN 2008; PAPAICONOMOU – POPLIN 2013; PAPAICONOMOU – MALAMIDOU 2013, 35; PAPAICONOMOU 2017a, 123.

³⁹ PAPAICONOMOU – MALAMIDOU 2013, 35.

⁴⁰ BARONE 1999.

⁴¹ PAPAICONOMOU 2006, 244-247; PAPAICONOMOU – POPLIN 2013; PAPAICONOMOU 2017a, 126; PAPAICONOMOU 2017b, 137-139.



Fig. 7

associating the astragal with Artemis but also with other deities, like the Charites, Auxo and Thaleia and also Pan.⁴²

Thousands of knucklebones have been deposited in sanctuaries of kourotrophic deities, initially probably by breeders or shepherds, in the sense of a metonymic value, in prayer to the divinity to protect the flocks, as highlighted by inscriptions as well as by written sources.⁴³ When inscribed, that was either with the initial of the dedicator, or with the purpose to serve also for divination or astragalomancy.⁴⁴ Rolling the knucklebones for oracular purposes is mentioned by Pausanias when he visits the cave of the little statue of Heracles Bouraïkos in Achaia and explains the way of consulting.⁴⁵ Thousands of astragals with this divinatory and also other functions have been found in other caves as the Corycian Cave and the Cave of the Leibeithrides and Coroneia Nymphs on Mount *Helicon*. On the contrary, bronze or natural oxen knucklebones were normally dedications, like those to Hera in Samos and to Artemis in Myrina, Lemnos.⁴⁶

⁴² Callim. *Hymn* 3, 128; ΠΑΡΑΙΚΟΝΟΜΟΥ 2017a.

⁴³ For a divinity protecting the flocks see Aesch., *Ag.*, Epode 140; ΠΑΡΑΙΚΟΝΟΜΟΥ 2017a, n. 98. The flocks consist in cloven-footed animals, especially goats and sheep. The most knucklebones in sanctuaries come, in Greece, from these two species.

⁴⁴ GRAF 2005; ΠΑΡΑΙΚΟΝΟΜΟΥ – ΜΑΛΑΜΙΔΟΥ 2013; ΠΑΡΑΙΚΟΝΟΜΟΥ 2017a 125-126.

⁴⁵ Paus. 7.25.10: ...καὶ Ἡρακλῆς οὐ μέγας ἐστὶν ἐν σπηλαίῳ· ἐπὶ κλησὶς μὲν καὶ τοῦτου Βουραϊκός, μαντείας δὲ ἐπὶ πίνακι τε καὶ ἀστραγάλῳις ἔστι [λαβεῖν]. Εὐχεται μὲν γὰρ πρὸ τοῦ ἀγάλματος ὁ τῷ θεῷ χρώμενος, ἐπὶ δὲ τῇ εὐχῇ λαβῶν ἀστραγάλους –οὶ δὲ ἄφθονοι παρὰ τῷ Ἡρακλεῖ κείνται -, τέσσαρας ἀφήσιν ἐπὶ τῆς τραπέζης· ἐπὶ δὲ παντὶ ἀστραγάλῳι σχήματι γεγραμμένα ἐν πίνακι ἐπίτηδες ἐξήγησιν ἔχει τοῦ σχήματος.

⁴⁶ IDP personal inspection of material in Lemnos some years before the accidents caused to the museum by the earthquake.

Knucklebones of goats, sheep, or deer were playthings pertaining to ability games *par excellence*. The astragals were especially favoured by boys and little girls, but older girls played differently from children and young women; the astragal's size permitted holding them in the hollow of a flexed palm.

Aristotle described how this little bone is naturally made perfect like a piece of sculpture. The philosopher used the verb *plassein* (πλάσσειν, “to shape by hand”),⁴⁷ to describe this. Not only the shape of the knucklebone is pleasant, but also its feeling because of its material density, that is the distribution of its mass in relation to its volume and weight. These elements, reflecting some consistency properties of metal and minerals and so creating in the mind of the people the mental image of mineral pieces with their colours, might explain why people handling knucklebones had the impression of handling precious material, and why knucklebones are often made in precious metal, or in rock crystal and glass, in red, amber, yellow and blue colour, imparting a sense of similar consistency. Knucklebones also served as pre monetary units.⁴⁸

Additional to this quality, is its morphology of essentially four sides, described by Aristotle as they appear standing up in the articulation of the animal's posterior members- *yption*, *pranes*, *kolon* and *ischion*,⁴⁹ allowing it to fall in four ways and thus permitting its use in children play and in adults' board games in place of dice. The throws in that case excluded two and five.⁵⁰

To what extent is throwing the astragals a game? The very moment throwing takes place, the laws of probability apply. That this gesture constitutes universally a game is demonstrated by the following conditions posed by the anthropologists: the player plays alone in an intimate way, or collectively; he/she plays consciously for entertainment or in competition with others. He/she decides to play, follows rules implicit or explicit and shared, knows that normally this game has no consequences on the player's

⁴⁷ Arist., *Hist. an.*, II, 1. 15-16; POPLIN 1989.

⁴⁸ POPLIN 1991; ΠΑΠΑΙΚΟΝΟΜΟΥ 2006, 247.

⁴⁹ Arist., *Hist. an.*, 499b 22-500a1-5: ἔχει δ' ὀρθόν τόν ἀστράγαλον ἐν τῇ καμπῇ, τὸ μὲν **πρανὲς** ἔξω, τὸ δὲ **ἰπτίον** εἶσω, καὶ τὰ μὲν **κῶα** ἐντός ἐστραμμένα πρὸς ἄλληλα, τὰ δὲ ἰσχία καλούμενα ἔξω καὶ τὰς **κεραίας** ἄνω” (ed. D.M. Balme, Cambridge, 2002).

⁵⁰ Poll., *Onom.*, IX.99-103; SCHÄDLER 1996; IGNIATIDOU 2013, 226, fig. 188. On these names see VESPA 2021.

real life and the player has the uncertainty of the outcome of the game.⁵¹ It is a game as much as rolling the dice is a game, with the sole difference that in the case of the dice there are six possibilities while, with the knucklebone, there are only four and between these four only two are more probable as two of its surfaces are broader than the others. This makes the issue of the game more interesting because, as Ulrich Schädler notes: “the game looks like life where the normal happens often and the unusual, good or bad, happens only rarely”.⁵² The outcome is very important for the boy of Lilaia as the artist chose to put in his hand only two possibilities as the astragal is presented with its narrow «unusual» and less probable side.

The term for a child in Greek is *παῖς*, both for boys and girls, the former until they become epehebes, the latter until their wedding. This term is etymologically related to the verb *παίζω*, “to play”. The same term also corresponds to the term *Paidia*, the “game”, personified as a Nymph having two sisters, *Eukleia* and *Eunomia* (both names evoke the good reputation, good regulations, and laws required). Plato in his *Laws*, but also in his *Republic*, associates *Paidia* with *Paideia*, “education”, and proceeds to a normative speech on the educational value, applicable throughout Antiquity, and until the Renaissance and J.J. Rousseau⁵³. The aim of this training is to impart strong virtues to children, and to create men of duty who respect the order and social hierarchies of the city.⁵⁴ In the Greek culture, the game also acquires the sense of having fun, entertaining, joking, making fun of,⁵⁵ deviating, and deceiving. Several linguists believe this is also expressed by the verb *πλάγγω*, *πλάζω*, “to banter”, and the resulting term *πλαγγών*, “wax doll”, used in the practice of magic.⁵⁶ It is precisely this meaning, associated to probabilities and the restrictions concerning the issues mentioned above by U. Schädler, that leads to the divination (*μαντική*) practiced with the astragals by girls, either individually or in the company of other girls, in order to foresee a prospective marriage

⁵¹ HAMAYON 2012, 41.

⁵² SCHÄDLER 2013, 62.

⁵³ Pl., *Resp.*, 4.424e-425a (trans. E. Chambry, CUF).

⁵⁴ Pl., *Leg.*, 793 e.

⁵⁵ HAMAYON 2012, 91, 43-44. For further and more recent bibliography on the different values of *paidia* see KIDD 2020. On definition on play for Antiquity see also DASEN – VESPA 2021.

⁵⁶ According to Suidas the animal figurines (“*plangones, exapatasthai ta paidia eiothen*”) are used by children to fool each other during play involving animation; see HAMAYON 2012, 43-44, 167; PAPAICONOMOU 2019.

and childbirth.⁵⁷ Respectively, lovers seek to foresee the fulfilment of love and thus Eros is represented as a child playing knucklebones. According to Anacreon⁵⁸ every throw of the knucklebones by Eros results in fury and troubles. According to Claude Calame, Anacreon meant that “the knucklebones of Eros are only his follies. They refer to the disorderly struggles in which he sends his victims, as he does with the play of ball in which he engages a young girl”, following the reading of another poem by Renate Schlesier.⁵⁹ In this sense, the example of the bronze boy of Dodona combining the astragal with a ball could be a good metaphor for Eros.

Knucklebones are appreciated in ancient literary sources as the *par excellence* game for boys. Plato shows in *Lysis* the ritual context of the palaestra, where boys are playing in pairs after a religious ceremony and a sacrifice. They are adorned, probably with festive diadems like the Lilaia boy.⁶⁰ They practice the game in sanctuaries and in everyday life. Numerous knucklebones have been excavated in sanctuaries and burials, mainly of children, in various combinations displaying different outcomes of the game depending on the sex and the age of the dead, the combination of the astragals and their forms.⁶¹

4. The goose

When viewing the bird held by the boy of Lilaia, one may wonder whether it is a duck or a goose (Fig. 8). The publications of the statue refer to a χηναλώπηξ, *chenalopex*, based on the bird’s size, on its visible slender neck, as well as in reference to the *Mimiamboi* of Herondas mentioned above. Nikolaos Kaltsas identified a duck. However, what could be the

⁵⁷ ΠΑΡΑΙΚΟΝΟΜΟΥ – ΜΑΛΑΜΙΔΟΥ 2013.

⁵⁸ Anac., fr. 398 P. = 46B = 34D, schol. to Hom., *Il.*, 23.88: ἀστραγάλοι δ’ Ἐρωτός εἰσιν / μανίαί τε καὶ κυδομοὶ (D. L. Page Oxford 1962). See also Fgt 398 schol. to Hom., *Il.*, 23.88 (v 382 Erbse) (ἄμφ’ ἀστραγάλοισι χολωθεῖς) αἱ πλείους τῶν κατὰ ἄνδρα ἄμφ’ ἀστραγάλησιν ἐρίσσας καὶ ἔστιν Ἴωνικώτερον: ἀστραγάλοι δ’ Ἐρωτό...

(https://www.loebclassics.com/view/anacreon-fragments/1988/pb_LCL143.83.xml/visited27.11.2019).

⁵⁹ Sappho, fr. 130 [Voigt]; CALAME 1996, 26, n. 77 “Pour Anacréon les osselets d’Éros ne sont rien d’autre que ses folies ; elles renvoient aux luttes désordonnées dans lesquelles il engage ses victimes”; see also SCHLESIER 1986-87.

⁶⁰ Pl., *Lys.*, 206 e-207a: Εἰσελθόντες δὲ κατελάβομεν αὐτόθι τεθυκότας τε τοὺς παῖδας καὶ τὰ περὶ τὰ ἱερεῖα σχεδόν τι ἤδη πεπονημένα, ἀστραγαλίζοντάς τε δὴ καὶ κεκοσμημένους ἅπαντας. Οἱ μὲν οὖν πολλοὶ ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ ἐπαίζον ἔξω, οἱ δὲ τινες τοῦ ἀποδυτηρίου ἐν γωνία ἠρτίζον ἀστραγάλοις παμπόλλοις, ἐκ φορμίσκων τινῶν προαιρούμενοι. Τούτους δὲ περιέστασαν ἄλλοι θεωροῦντες...

⁶¹ ΠΑΡΑΙΚΟΝΟΜΟΥ – ΡΟΠΛΙΝ 2013. On children’s games in sanctuaries see also ΠΑΡΑΙΚΟΝΟΜΟΥ 2019 (in press), CASTIGLIONE 2020; DASEN 2020.

role of a goose as the companion of a child between four to seven years old? What do we know about the behaviour of this bird? It is surprising that studies on childhood in ancient Greece consider animals collectively and differentiate only pets or birds. It is also not sufficient to correlate birds with deities, as sometimes the same birds accompany children and many divinities. The issue is to discover the cultural and religious aspects attributed by the Greeks to these birds.

The name of the goose in Greek is χήν (Latin *anser*)⁶² denoting both the wild and the domesticated geese, which belong to the family of *Anatidae*/Νησιίδες, the web-footed (στεγανόποδες),⁶³ including ducks and many birds, sometimes difficult to distinguish.⁶⁴ The individual species were not clearly mentioned in antiquity but concerning the goose represented in our group, we can refer to Aristotle who mentioned that some geese are relatively small,⁶⁵ so, depending on its size, this might be the *Branta bernicla* (μαυροκέφαλη), the *Branta ruficollis* (κοκκινόχηνα) or the *Anser erythropus* (κοκκινόποδαρη (54-66 cm long)).⁶⁶ Actually, there are two species that, in the past, were considered to belong to the geese family⁶⁷, but they are today considered by the specialists of the Goulandris Natural History Museum as two ducks that look like geese, the *chenalopex* or *chenalops*



Fig. 8

⁶² On the bird see APALODEMOS 1993, 45: *Tadorna ferruginea*, Ruddy Shelduck *Chenalopex*, goose-like duck known in Northern Greece Macedonia, 44: *Alopochen aegyptiacus*, Egyptian Goose, another goose-like duck; ARNOTT 2007, 30-32 (*chen*, *chenalopex*).

⁶³ Arist., *Part. an.*, 695a.16: thanks to the interdigital membrane (palmure) which retains the foot as a united sole (palmipede) (ZUCKER, 2005, 253 and n. 316).

⁶⁴ Among them the Greylag *Anser anser* (σταχτόχηνα), the White-fronted *Albifrons* (ασπρομέτωπη), the Lesser *Erythropus*, the Brent Brant *ruficollis* and the Red-breasted *Branta bernicla*.

⁶⁵ Arist., *Hist. an.*, 597b.29-30.

⁶⁶ APALODEMOS 1993, 43, 42, and 39 respectively.

⁶⁷ ARNOTT 2007, 31.

(χηναλώπηξ = “goose/fox”). These two ducks are the Egyptian Goose, *Chenalopex aegyptiacus* (ca. 67 cm, αιγυπτιακή χηνόπαπια) and the Ruddy Shelduck, *Tadorna ferruginea* (ca. 64 cm, καστανόχηννα).⁶⁸ They are of similar size and appearance, notoriously aggressive, and noisy. Aristophanes and Herodotus⁶⁹ mention them, and although Herodotus refers to a Nile bird, *Chenalopex aegyptiacus*, the references of Aristophanes and Herodas may imply that some Egyptian Geese have been imported to Greece and kept as pets, like the Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*), which still breeds in northern Greece, Lesbos, and the corresponding Turkish coast.⁷⁰ The Nilotic mosaics present both types of *chenalopekes*. These are the species proposed by the researchers to be identified with our goose. The figurine of Eros of Nikesiane (Fig. 2)⁷¹ carries most probably one of them, thus testifying to the presence of the bird in Macedonia, as the bird still preserves its colours, and shows the importance of the bird in the cult of Aphrodite and for love affairs. We don’t know more about the species visiting Greece in the past in regions where drainage of wetlands has drastically reduced the numbers of wild geese as is the case of Copais Lake in Boeotia, not far away from Lilaia. The *Tadorna* is an easily tamed bird, therefore we can propose that the boy of Lilaia is holding this particular species. An Attic plastic vase from Thessaloniki and dated from the end of the 5th – beginning of the 4th century BC, is important for the dating of the statue,⁷² and corroborates our argument (Fig. 9). It is decorated on one side with the figure of a *chenalopex* and also preserves its colours, which indicates a *Tadorna*. It helps to better understand the rendering of the original colours, absent today from our statue and partly confirmed thanks to the expertise of Dr. Irini Poupaki, but in antiquity necessary for the identification of the bird.

H. Rühfel considers the bird to be an animal to play but the notion of a companion animal changes over time – there is a whole Lilian Bodson conference on the history of this notion – so we cannot use this current expression.⁷³ Lesley Beaumont remarks that children involve animals in

⁶⁸ APALODEMOS 1993, 44-45.

⁶⁹ Hdt. 2.72; Ar., *Av.*, 1295; Herod. 4.31.

⁷⁰ ARNOTT 2007, 31.

⁷¹ Archaeological Museum of Kavala E 297, figurine of Eros holding a water-bird H 13.1 cm, tumulus of Nikisiani: ADAM-VELENI *et alii* 2017, 350, cat. no 394 (MALAMIDOU).

⁷² Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki MTh 11622, Attic plastic vase (private collection, unknown provenance), ADAM-VELENI *et alii* 2017, 456-457 cat. no. 628 (TOULOUMTZIDOU).

⁷³ RÜHFEL 1984, 227 calls it “Spieltier”. BODSON 1997.

their ritual games, e.g. goats to carry their chariot during the Anthesteria⁷⁴ and perhaps during other events related to Dionysos and the wine. The swan (same family, *Anatidae*) or some kind of goose is shown pulling a cart loaded with wreathed choes, without the presence of children.⁷⁵ The picture does not allow distinguishing whether it is a chen or kyknos. Even when the goose is not wild, it is not a so agreeable companion but rather an aggressive bird; in this sense it makes a good guardian for the child it protects, and this is why it accompanies children on their funerary *stelai*⁷⁶ and vases.⁷⁷ It often scares young children with its crows and sometimes bites them, but as the *Tadorna* is an easily tamed bird, it could become a companion of a young boy, as it probably happened for the boy of our statue. The goose had been domesticated in the Greek world as early as the Homeric times. Penelope dreamt that an eagle had killed her geese, like Odysseus would kill the pretenders upon his return.⁷⁸ In a similar way, Helen understood the capturing of a white goose by an eagle to be a very good omen, announcing the return home of Odysseus.⁷⁹ The goose is a bird associated with divination and oracles foreseeing good things. The oracular aspect of the birds (οἰωνός, οἰωνίσμα)⁸⁰ is also seen in Aristophanes' *Birds*.⁸¹ The main aspect of the birds in general is their presence in the air. They can fly, also above Olympus, where mortals have no access. People observe their flight combinations while trying to predict the future.

In addition to the protective and oracular qualities of the geese, those must be seen as birds of the wetlands, river banks and the lake edges and marshes.⁸² They are able to move between water and land (*amphibia*)⁸³ and

⁷⁴ On children racing with goats in the sanctuary see also DASEN 2020, 110-111, fig. 8-10.

⁷⁵ Attic red figure chous depicting a swan harnessed to a little cart and wheeled stick used for the transport of wreathed choes to emphasize the ritual significance of the *amaxis* and of the bird on the chous, Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum Gr.5-1929, ca. 460 BC.: BEAUMONT 2012, 79 fig. 3.24. See also ΠΑΡΑΙΚΟΝΟΜΟΥ 2008, 2019 (in press); AMMAR 2020.

⁷⁶ Stele of Plangon; see above.

⁷⁷ Attic white lekythos by the Triglyph Painter with prothesis scene of young boy with goose; see above.

⁷⁸ Hom., *Od.*, 19.536-52; ΤΟΥΝΒΕΕ 2013, 261.

⁷⁹ Hom., *Od.*, 15.161-2, 174-6.

⁸⁰ Suidas, sv. οἰωνίσμα: omen, presage, οἰωνιστής: person who interprets the flight of birds. ZUCKER 2005, 58-59; Οἰωνός: term corresponding from Homer on to the oracular birds.

⁸¹ Ar., *Av.*, 708: πάντα δὲ θνητοῖς ἀφ' ἡμῶν τῶν ὀρνίθων τὰ μέγιστα; see also 719: ὄρνιν τε νομίζετε πάνθ' ὅσα περ περὶ μαντείας διακρίνει.

⁸² Arist., *Hist. an.*, 615 a 24; ZUCKER 2005, 254, n. 326.

⁸³ Hsch. A 3957, ἀμφίβιος: able to live between the land and the water; ἔνυδρα, νηκτά, νευστικά, ἀμφίβια.

they are the only birds able to swim thanks to their quality of *steganopodes*,⁸⁴ and thus have access to the mortals' world, and to the Underworld. This aspect places them within the natural landscape of Artemis⁸⁵ but also allows them to lead to the paths of Persephone. Both the Lilaia and the Brauron statues have been found in wetlands, known also for the cult of the rivers, the Nymphs and Artemis. The isolated presence of the goose is also a connection, through Dionysos, the god who shares the sanctuary with Artemis in Brauron,⁸⁶ to the Underworld where the god travelled and to the Anthesteria venerated in his sanctuary *En limnais* (εν λίμναις), "in the marshes", meant as wetland in the literary and metaphorical sense.

Conclusions – Commemoration of a healing?

I. Svoronos identified the boy with Ianiskos, the divine boy doctor, while the wetland habitat of the geese led him to interpret the suppression of the bird by the boy as a symbolic gesture. He compared it with the killing of mythological wetland creatures personifying the fatal marsh fevers from which young children often died. He thus saw the boy depicted during a heroic activity contributing to communal health.⁸⁷

Our suggestion is that the hint to an averted danger is further stressed by the presence of the knucklebone and its use by rolling, like a die. The earlier ancient Greek word for a die, and thus presumably also for a singly rolled knucklebone, is κίνδυνος. The phrase κίνδυνον ἀναρρίπτειν (rolling the die) appears since the 5th century BC.⁸⁸ Later the noun changed from concrete to abstract to denote not an object but the notion of risk or danger.⁸⁹

We cannot however exclude the possibility that this could be the statue of a boy in the guise of Ianiskos, a boy-healer, the youngest son of Asclepios, dedicated to a local sanctuary to commemorate a special occasion. We can understand how proud the boy of Lilaia is in possessing his own knucklebone and holding the goose steadfast, having won the challenge of keeping them both under his control. But is there more than that?

⁸⁴ Arist., *Hist. an.*, 504 A 6; *Part. An.* 694 b2.

⁸⁵ COLE 2004.

⁸⁶ BRULÉ 1987.

⁸⁷ SVORONOS 1909, 174-177.

⁸⁸ KOROLAKIS 1965, 23-41.

⁸⁹ The same happened to the Latin term *alea* and the Byzantine Greek term κόττος; see ΚΟΥΚΟΥΛΕΣ 1948, 204.

In an episode preceding our work by half a century, the little Epidaurian boy Euphanes, suffering from lithiasis,⁹⁰ is healed by Asclepios and offers to repay the god with his only fortune: 10 knucklebones.⁹¹ Do perhaps knucklebones in the hands of children statues dedicated to sanctuaries connote to healing episodes? We can probably assume that following his blessing or healing by Kephissos, or by Artemis and Apollo, the Lilaia boy treasures his two playthings related to his chances for health, fortune, and, in the future, success in love. This makes the little boy happy and gives him his radiant face. If the dedication had been made by parents of a sick child, of marsh fever (?), their hope and their prayers are reflected in the position of the knucklebone that can only be rolled towards the desired outcome, the unusual and happy one, as also in the presence of the goose which will transmit the expected good omen to the divinities.

Geese were often sacrificed to many divinities like Aphrodite and Isis, both kourtophroi deities in different senses. Pausanias leaving Tithorea just before accessing Lilaia mentions a sanctuary of Asclepios and after that one of Isis,⁹² and describes a festival in her honour where geese were sacrificed in the Egyptian way. Perhaps the 3rd century is too early for this Isis cult in the region, but the presence and the raising of the Egyptian geese in Phocis can be now assumed as part of a tradition observed by poor people who sacrificed geese instead of the oxen and deer offered by wealthy worshippers.

Appendix: A note on the marble by Irimi Poupaki

The marble used for the statue is white with a slight yellow tinge, luminous, thin grained and of medium translucency without any veins. There is a deficit of the marble at the back corner of the plinth underneath the stele. Although the marble presents the “Lychnitic” quality characteristics, i.e. white colour, high translucency and good crystallization, which is identical

⁹⁰ ΠΑΡΑΙΚΟΝΟΜΟΥ forthcoming.

⁹¹ IG IV2 I.121-122 (2nd half of the 4th c. BC): Εὐφάνης Ἐπιδαύριος παῖς. Οὗτος λιθίων ἐνε[κά] δευδε. ἔδοξε δὴ αὐτῷ ὁ θεός ἐπιστάς εἰπεῖν. “τί μοι δώσεῖς, αἱ τύ/κα ὑγιή ποιήσω”. αὐτός δὲ φάμεν “δέκ’ ἀστραγάλους”. Τὸν δὲ θεὸν γελά/σαντα φάμεν νιν πανσεῖν. ἀμέρας δὲ γενομένας ὑγιῆς ἐξῆλθε. (“Euphanes, a boy of Epidaurus. Suffering from stone he slept in the temple. It seemed to him that the god stood by him and asked. “What will you give me if I cure you?” “Ten knucklebones”, he answered. The god laughed and said to him that he would cure him. When day came, he walked out sound.” (trans. in EDELSTEIN – EDELSTEIN 1945, 231).

⁹² Paus. 10. 32.12-18.

with marbles quarried in the Valley of Marathi of Paros, either from the underground *Nymphs and Pan* quarries, or from the open quarries,⁹³ the fact that the translucency of the marble of the sculpture is rather medium, allows us to assume that the origin of the marble is non-lychnitic and can probably be identified with the open air quarries of Lakkes or Marathi, too. The use of the best quality Parian marble for making statues of children has been recently confirmed by means of physico-chemical analysis for the so-called “Temple-boy” of Stymphalos, of the late 4th century BC, which was carved in lychnitic marble.⁹⁴

Traces of paint are visible on the surface of the pillar, where we noticed the use of reddish colour, and on the internal surface of the curved neck of the bird, where we believe that brown colour was used.

⁹³ TAMPAKOPOULOS – MANIATIS 2017.

⁹⁴ MANIATIS *et alii* 2012.

Illustrations

Fig. 1. Marble statue (H. with plinth 86 cm; W. 34 cm; D. 16.5 cm), from Lilaia, Phocis. Athens, National Archaeological Museum 2772. © NAM.

Fig. 2. Terracotta figurine, H 13.1 cm, from the tumulus of Nikisiani (?). Archaeological Museum of Kavala E 297. © The authors.

Fig. 3a. Bronze statuette. Dodona, Archaeological Museum of Ioannina 1371. © V. Mehl.

Fig. 3b. Bronze statuette (H. 14 cm). Archaeological Museum of Ioannina 1410. © V. Mehl.

Fig. 4. Terracotta figurine NAMA 33062. Unknown provenance. © E. Galanopoulos.

Fig. 5. Marble statuette. Archaeological Museum of Brauron. 1241. Brauron. © V. Mehl.

Fig. 6. Astragal in the hand of the statue from Lilaia, Phocis. Athens, National Archaeological Museum 2772. © The authors.

Fig. 7. Front and back of the goose of the statue, from Lilaia, Phocis. Athens, National Archaeological Museum 2772. © The authors.

Fig. 8. Attic plastic vase with relief goose. Unknown provenance. Thessaloniki, Archaeological Museum 11662. After ADAM-VELENI 2017, cat. no. 628.

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A playful coroplast? A new look at the terracotta group of the early Roman board-game players NAM 4200 and related finds

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Abstract. The paper aims to offer a new look on the published early Roman terracotta group of the National Archaeological Museum inv. no. 4200, which is comprised of a male and female couple of board-game players in the company of a dwarf, by reanalysing its figures, board-game type and presenting some of its hitherto unknown details in the form of impressed images made by the coroplast on the back of the two player figures. These impressed images, if intentional, meaningful and not random, together with parallel finds, are examined in the light of information they can offer regarding the board-game type represented in the terracotta group, the possible winner of the game or gaming attitudes related to the gestures of the figures. An overview of relevant Roman and earlier literary sources and comparisons with related finds are included. Instances of ceramic, terracotta, metal or other finds with -random or intentional- impressed signs and symbols made in coroplastic or other workshops, as well as examples of post-manufacture graffiti by a possible user are presented and investigated, leading to possible interpretations of ludic concepts represented by the figural synthesis of the terracotta group NAM 4200.

Terracotta-group, Roman, Athens, game-board, bird (goose), flower

Περίληψη. Το άρθρο αυτό στοχεύει να προσφέρει μια νέα οπτική στο δημοσιευμένο πήλινο σύμπλεγμα ειδωλίων του Εθνικού Αρχαιολογικού Μουσείου με αρ. ευρ. 4200, των πρώιμων ρωμαϊκών χρόνων, που αποτελείται από ένα ζευγάρι παικτών – μία ανδρική και μία γυναικεία μορφή – ενός επιτραπέζιου παιχνιδιού παρουσία ενός νάνου. Στο κείμενο αναλύονται εκ νέου οι μορφές, ο τύπος του επιτραπέζιου παιχνιδιού και παρουσιάζονται ορισμένες άγνωστες μέχρι τώρα λεπτομέρειες υπό την μορφή εμπιέστων απεικονίσεων που έφτιαξε ο κοροπλάστης στην πίσω όψη των μορφών των δύο παικτών. Αυτές οι εμπιέστες απεικονίσεις στην περίπτωση που είναι εκούσιες, νοηματοδοτημένες και όχι τυχαίες, εξετάζονται μαζί με παράλληλα ευρήματα υπό το πρίσμα των πληροφοριών που μπορούν να προσφέρουν ως προς τον τύπο της τράπεζας παιχνιδιού που αναπαρίσταται στο πήλινο σύμπλεγμα, τον πιθανό νικητή της παρτίδας ή τις συμπεριφορές κατά την διάρκεια του παιχνιδιού, που σχετίζονται με τις χειρονομίες των μορφών. Συνοψίζονται επίσης συναφείς ρωμαϊκές και πρωιμότερες φιλολογικές πηγές, και γίνονται συγκρίσεις με παρόμοια ευρήματα. Περιπτώσεις αγγείων, πήλινων ειδωλίων, μεταλλικών ή άλλων αντικειμένων με – τυχαία ή εκούσια – εμπιέστα σημεία και σύμβολα κατασκευασμένα σε κοροπλαστικά ή άλλα εργαστήρια, καθώς και παραδείγματα επιγραφών που χαράχθηκαν μετά την όπτηση από κάποιον πιθανό χρήστη, παρουσιάζονται και διερευνώνται οδηγώντας σε πιθανές ερμηνείες των αντιλήψεων του παιχνιδιού, που αντιπροσωπεύονται από την διάταξη των μορφών του πήλινου συμπλέγματος EAM 4200.

Πήλινο σύμπλεγμα, ρωμαϊκό, Αθήνα, τράπεζα παιχνιδιού, πτηνό (χήνα), άνθος

Riassunto. L'articolo si propone di offrire una revisione del già edito gruppo conservato al Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Atene (inv. no. 4200) ed attribuito all'età romana, composto da una coppia di giocatori (un uomo ed una donna) impegnati in un gioco da tavolo in compagnia di un nano. Nel testo si prendono in esame le figure dei giocatori, il tipo di tavola da gioco ed alcuni dettagli sinora ignoti, rappresentati dai motivi impressi dal coroplasta sul retro di due figure. Tali motivi, verosimilmente intenzionali e non casuali, vengono esaminati insieme ad evidenze analoghe, con l'obiettivo di dedurre informazioni riguardo al tipo di gioco rappresentato, al possibile vincitore ed alle reazioni degli altri giocatori deducibili dai gesti dei personaggi. Il contributo offre, inoltre, una panoramica delle fonti letterarie di età romana e precedenti, oltre che confronti con reperti affini. Vengono discussi manufatti in ceramica, terracotta, metallo o altri materiali con segni e simboli – sia casuali che intenzionali – impressi in laboratorio durante la fase di produzione, così come esempi di graffiti post-produzione riconducibili ad un possibile utente. Questo tipo di approccio permette di avanzare alcune proposte interpretative riguardo al gioco documentato dal gruppo NAM 4200.

Gruppo di terracotta, romano, Atene, *tabula lusoria*, uccello (oca), fiore

Introduction

Games of strategy and luck played with pieces (*pessoi*) on a marked board (*pessëia* or *petteia*) are considered as some of the most popular ancient types of games among many peoples and civilizations. In Greece, this type of game is mentioned in the *Homeric* poems¹ and in ancient drama. Different theories about the origin of board games existed among the Greeks. According to one myth, games were invented by *Palamedes* while the Achaeans had to wait in Aulis, in Boeotia, on the coast opposite Euboea,² for the right wind to sail to the Troad for the Trojan War or during the long siege of Troy.³ Herodotus claims that the Lydians invented board games, while Plato testifies on their Egyptian origin.⁴ In Greece, some of the early instances of clay game-board models come from sanctuary deposits, such as the models from the sanctuaries of *Hera Akraia* and *Hera Limenia* at Perachora in the Peloponnese that are dated to the early 7th century BC.⁵ Clay game-board models and other game pieces found in ancient sanctuaries were apparently *ex-votos*, offered by members of the community to a god or goddess, sometimes connected to rites of passage or other civic matters. Other examples come from funerary contexts in Greek sites, including clay game-board models of the mid-7th and early 6th century BC, from offering pits in the Kerameikos in Athens and Vari in Attica. Another clay game-board model was found in an archaic grave in the area of the ancient Attic demos of *Myrrhinous*, modern Markopoulo, and it is kept in the Archaeological Museum at Brauron (Vravrona).⁶ Clay

¹ Heartfelt thanks are due to the Barbara Carè, Véronique Dasen and Ulrich Schädler for their kind invitation to present the terracotta figurine group NAM 4200 and related finds in the panel dedicated to ancient games at the Board Game Studies XXI/ERC Locus Ludi Conference in Athens and later on at Fribourg University in the research group ERC Locus Ludi, as well as to Barbara Carè for her help and translation of the paper abstract in Italian.

Od., 1.106-107.

² Eur., *IA*, 192-199.

³ Soph., *Palamedes*, frg. Nauck² 236, no. 435; Plin., *HN*, 7, 57. On Palamedes, as a symbolic hero-figure in various fields of ancient Greek religion, cognition and imagination see VESPA 2020 and VESPA 2021.

⁴ Hdt., 1.94.2; Pl., *Phdr*, 274 c-d. See WHITTAKER 2004, 296-297.

⁵ Game-board models as *ex-votos*: PAYNE 1962, 131-132, nos. 1325-1328, pls. 39, 132-133. See also the clay dice and game pieces from the Acropolis of Athens: GRAEF – LANGLOTZ 1925, vol. I, 259-260. Stone game-boards (or abaci?) from the sanctuary of Asklepios at Epidauros: BLINKENBERG 1898, 1-23; SCHÄDLER 2009 a, 174, 181, 184; on their identification as abaci see SCHÄRLIG 2001 and the contribution of V. Dasen and J. Gavin in this volume.

⁶ Clay game-board models from ancient cemeteries: NAM 25665, (with mourners, of the mid-7th c. BC, from the offering trench of a cremation burial in Vari). H. 18 cm, W. 18.3 cm, L. 24.8 cm,

board-game models found in ancient graves and funerary offering pits, often with terracotta figures of mourners attached, have been interpreted as symbolic images of death, as an end to the game of life.⁷ It has been suggested that, apart from the evident heroic and elite values, funerary symbolism is also present in attic black- or red-figure vase images of the doomed mythic warrior-heroes, Achilles and Ajax, playing a board game. This iconographic theme, found on more than 150 Attic vases, was popular in late archaic attic vase-painting, as well as in other art forms.⁸ As a favourite pastime of the Greeks, the Egyptians and other Mediterranean people, board-games and toys, such as spinning tops (*strombos-oi*) and knucklebones (*astragals*), acquired uses and symbolisms for matters both of everyday life and death. Game pieces have been found in graves, such as in graves of the late 4th to early 3rd century BC in the region of the ancient city-state of Eretria, in Euboea Island.⁹

1. A unique terracotta scene of play

The terracotta figurine group NAM 4200 (Fig. 1; 1st c. AD) is reported to have been found in Athens in 1855 during construction works in the area of the building of the royal palace. In 1836, three years after the creation of the modern Greek state at the end of the Greek War of Independence, a palace was constructed in Athens for Otto (1815-1867), second son of king Ludwig I of Bavaria, and Amalia (1818-1875), daughter of the Duke Paul Frederick Augustus of Oldenburg. At that time, Otto and Amalia had been appointed king and queen of the Greeks. The same and renovated building

figurine height: 10 cm. KALLIPOLITIS 1963, 123-124, pls. 53-55; KALLIPOLITIS-FEYTMANS 1985, 35-38, figs. 5-8. The clay die NAM 25664 (dimensions: 2.5 x 2.5 x 2.5cm) was found together with the game-board. KALLIPOLITIS 1963, 124, pls. 55 b-e; KALLIPOLITIS-FEYTMANS 1985, 38-40, figs. 10-11. Clay game-board model, also with mourners, from the Kerameikos ("*Opferplatz Ψ, Anlage LXXV, near the city walls*"), dated 580-570 BC: KÜBLER 1970, 512-514, pl. 102; WHITTAKER 2004, 279; BANOU – BOURNIAS 2014, 267. A clay game-board model, dated to the early 6th c. BC, is housed in the National Museum in Copenhagen and another one in the Swiss Museum of Games: SCHÄDLER 2019, 98-99. On ancient clay game-board tables see also CHIDIROGLOU – SCHÄDLER – SCHIERUP, in preparation. For information on the clay game-board model in Brauron Museum I thank Eleni Andrikou, Head of the Ephorate of Antiquities of East Attica, and the archaeologist Katerina Petrou.

⁷ WHITTAKER 2004, 279-302.

⁸ *LMCI* (1981), s.v. Achilles, 96-103 (A. Kossatz-Deissmann); WHITTAKER 2004, 281; SCHÄDLER 2009b, 64-65, figs. 46-47.

⁹ WHITTAKER 2004, 279-288. Child's grave from Eretria in the Louvre: KALTSAS *et alii* 2010, 329-335 (I. Hasselin Rous, C. Huguenot).

on modern *Syntagma – Constitution* Square today houses the Greek Parliament. Ground levelling and gardening works are attested for the years from 1849 to 1855 in the areas outside the palace and we can therefore surmise that the terracotta find was rather accidentally found, probably in a grave destroyed during work of this type. Recent excavations have shown that a large cemetery with graves of prehistoric to late Roman times covered the area in front of the Parliament building.¹⁰

The terracotta figurine group NAM 4200 consists of three figures, two males and one female, occupied with a board-game of strategy.¹¹ The seated man and woman play the board-game, while a dwarf, with his face turned towards the man, stands and observes the game, as if ready to make comments. This figurine group recently came under renewed study on the grounds of its presentation in the exhibition galleries of the National Archaeological Museum, for a museum project in 2016, as well as for the purposes of the 21st Board Game Studies Colloquium in 2018. All the figures of the terracotta group wear long garments (*chiton* or Roman *tunica* for the man and Roman *stola* for the woman) and mantles (*himatia*). The woman wears a *himation* or *palla* over her head, with one of its ends hanging like a sash over her shoulder, a dress-type typical for Roman priestesses and women of elite status.¹² The two players are seated in wicker-type arm-chairs and have placed the game-board between them. The board is seen placed at a height that corresponds to chair arm-rests that are however not clearly denoted in clay. The game board (Fig. 2) is divided into 6 x 7



Fig. 1

¹⁰ ZACHARIADOU 2000, 148-161.

¹¹ NAM 4200. WINTER 1903, II, 465, 4; LAFAYE 1904, 993, figs. 4366-4367; SCHÄDLER 1994, 51-53; SCHÄDLER 2007, 361 (the "Doctor's game"). For the find see BURSIA 1855, 55-56; MICHAELIS 1863, 37-43, pl. 173; RICHTER 1887, 100-103, figs. 48-49. For a similar terracotta model of Roman times found in the Egyptian Fayoum see SCHÄDLER 2007, 361.

¹² Cf. GRANDJOUAN 1961, 78, no. 1019, pl. 29.



Figs. 2-3



Figs. 4-5

squares. There are twelve counters (*pessoi*) in various places on the board, one of which is held in the woman's right hand. No dice are depicted. The game played by the figures has been identified with *Poleis*, or a related precursor to the Roman *ludus latruncularum*.¹³ The woman (Fig. 3) is represented with her hands stretched over the board, as if trying to explain some movement or the process of the game, while her male opponent sits seemingly relaxed. On the back of the chair of the male player figure the image of a flower or rosette (Fig. 4) has been impressed by the ancient terracotta artist or *coroplast*, while that of a long-necked bird, probably a goose (Fig. 5), was impressed and easily incised when the clay was still damp before baking, on the back of the chair of his opponent. Based on stylistic grounds, the terracotta group is dated to the 1st century AD.¹⁴ The dwarf's

¹³ Poll., *Onom.*, 9.98. See SCHÄDLER 1994, 47-67; SCHÄDLER 2001, 10-11; SCHÄDLER 2002, 91-102.

¹⁴ For the Roman date of the group, see MICHAELIS 1863, 42. Some terracotta figurines of Roman Imperial times found in Athens and other regions share a number of stylistic traits with the terracotta group NAM 4200, such as the heavily built bodies and garment types of figures, as well as their schematically rendered facial features, cf. WINTER 1903, 465, 1-12; GRANDJOUAN 1961, 55, 59, nos. 416, 507, pls. 9, 11 (of the 1st to 2nd and probably of the 2nd c. AD, correspondingly). In late Hellenistic to early Roman times, terracotta figurines of dwarfs were produced in a number of

gaze and stance are probably meant to direct the viewer's eyes towards the central figure of the scene.

2. Dwarfs and match-making?

Dwarfs, and in general deformed or handicapped people, were often considered as belonging to a special class of entertainers or also to marginal social strata of the ancient Greek and Roman world. The presence of a dwarf in this terracotta group of players can be interpreted in a number of ways: he could be a family slave ready to serve his masters or a hired entertainer for some pantomime or theatrical act that may follow the game or a symposium. Dwarfs are mentioned by the sources as performers in elite banquets.¹⁵ In the ancient world, dwarfism or other deformities were also sometimes seen as good luck figures, perhaps meant for one of the players of the terracotta group. Based on iconographic parallels in other materials, the dwarf could also be interpreted as a match maker for the pair of players. This hypothesis would lend an air of courtship to the game-players and transform the game into a love metaphor.¹⁶ In all the above interpretations or other ones that can be suggested, the dwarf figure, with his close watch over the game, actually stands out as the observer or *narrator* of the story presented by the terracotta group. His presence would otherwise be easily dispensed with by the *coroplast*. He is there as part of the household and he relates (to) the story of the game.¹⁷

Terracotta figurines of board-game players are not very common. One additional example of Hellenistic or Roman times is in the Musée du Jouet in Moirans-en-Montagne (Fig. 6).¹⁸ This figurine represents a male figure, seated at a tripod table with game board. Representations of board-game players are not numerous either. In the series of Roman funerary reliefs

Greek cities, such as Athens, Smyrna and Myrina in Asia Minor, and they appear to have been popular, probably as apotropaic and magical objects, rather than sketches of pathological conditions, cf. for instance BESQUES 1971-1972, 169, no. D 1170, pl. 234 a.

¹⁵ DASEN 2013 [1993], 230-236; DASEN 2015.

¹⁶ Cf. Ov., *Ars am.* On the erotic metaphor of play, DASEN – MATHIEU 2021; SISSA 2021. Cf. also the scene of a love couple, a man and a woman, playing a board-game on a bronze mirror from Praeneste/Palestrina in the British Museum that also bears the inscription *opeinod devincam ted (opinor devincam te: "I think I have beaten you")*: SCHÄDLER 2009 a, 179, fig. 4.

¹⁷ There is often a third person depicted in gaming scenes see for instance the marble reliefs in Vienna and Turin and the Xenia mosaic from El-Djem: DÜTSCHKE 1880, nos. 23 and 31; SCHNEIDER 1905, pl. II.2.

¹⁸ I thank Veronique Dasen and Mélanie Bessard for this information.



Fig. 6

that include ash urns, stelae and altars, a number depict a man and a woman playing together.¹⁹

3. Playful inscriptions

We will briefly investigate the impressed signs on the back of the players' chairs and compare other similar and related finds in an attempt to illustrate their possible meaning or casual character. We will therefore attempt to investigate the following questions: are late Hellenistic and Roman inscriptions, impressed, or incised motifs on terracotta figurines meaningful, interpretative, or ran-

dom? Were images of flowers and birds meaningful in terms of social context vocabulary and especially in matters of chance or game-playing?

Inscriptions on terracotta figurines, lamps and plastic vases are rather rare, but then they are almost always meaningful and sometimes playful, too. One large category of such inscriptions for terracotta figurines are coroplasts' signatures.²⁰ These are usually in the form of the personal name of the main coroplast or workshop owner, or a related abbreviation. Due to their pictorial character and their number, the two motifs of the terracotta group NAM 4200 cannot be placed into this category, in the sense that they cannot be seen as abbreviations of a coroplast's name or workshop. On the other hand, there is a large corpus of known graffiti, especially on vases or vase sherds, many of which are certainly meaningful and intended.²¹ This

¹⁹ DÜTSCHKE 1880, nos. 23 and 31; SCHNEIDER 1905, pl. II.2. For the series see DASEN – MATHIEU 2021, fig. 6 (Turin), fig. 7 (Vienna), based on the ash urn of Margaris, freedwoman of Marcus Allius Herma, depicted playing *latrunculi*. The interpretation of the Palmyra relief in Boston, Museum of Fine Arts inv. no. 1970.346 is still debated. It could depict a distribution scene of *tesserae* for admission to a religious banquet, as ALBERTSON 2014 demonstrated, or a scene of play, as HEYN, forthcoming, suggests. On the ambiguities between board games, abaci and reckoning scenes see also SCHÄRLIG 2001 and V. Dasen – J. Gavin in this volume.

²⁰ See for instance MOLLARD-BESQUES 1963, 201-219.

²¹ Graffiti examples: LANG 1976, 6-7 (*abecedaria*), 8-11 (messages and lists), 11-15 (love and hate names), 23-51 (owners' marks), 55-81 (commercial notations), 94-95 (pictures, such as of caricatures and sexual abuse context).



Figs. 7-8

type of inscriptional testimony is incised on the object, well after its manufacture phase, and therefore cannot be of the impressed type.

In order to better explore the terracotta group NAM 4200, we will seek examples of inscriptions and motifs that act as commentary to the figural representation or iconography of their object and were made during the process of manufacture. An example of a contextual inscription is offered by the terracotta lamp group NAM 12424 (Fig. 7; ca. 2nd c. AD, based on inscription letter type) that consists of three actor or rather mime figures of a popular comedy titled *Hekyra* (*Mother in-Law*) by Terence, or an earlier version; the title of this comedy was purposefully inscribed on the back side of the terracotta lamp while the clay was still soft.²² Another example is offered by the inscribed jug NAM 2069 of the Hellenistic period from Skyros Island (Fig. 8)²³ with its plastic representation of an old lady holding a *lagynos* or wine jar. The representation of an inebriated

²² WINTER 1903, II, 429, 8; WATZINGER 1901, 1-8, with inscription: Μιμωλόγοι/ἡ ὑπόθ(ε)σις/ Εἰκὺρ(ἄ) and dating of the object in the late 3rd century BC; BIEBER 1920, fig. 142; BIEBER 1961, 107, fig. 415; HUNTER 2002, 198, fig. 30 (following WATZINGER 1901 as to the dating of the object). If the lamp is dated in the late 3rd century BC, the inscription cannot refer to Terence's *Hekyra* (165 BC), but to the homonymous predecessor play by Apollodoros of Karystos (floruit ca. 300-260 BC) or a similarly titled popular play or mime version. For Apollodoros of Karystos see for instance: LESKI 1981, 919.

²³ WEISHAUPL 1891, 143-152, pl. 10; WINTER 1903, II, 468, 8.



Fig. 9

powerless old woman was a genre theme in Hellenistic sculpture and most probably not unknown to people participating in public feasts in any ancient city. The inscription on the jug from Skyros is quite explicit: γραῦς ἦδε οἰνοφόρος κεχαρημέ(νη ὄδ)ε κάθηται (“This old lady, full of wine, joyfully seats here”), a pun on the shape and the content of the vessel.²⁴ A fragmentary terracotta

mould from the Athenian Agora dated some time before 267 AD is another example. It bears the representation of a draped woman wearing a mask that reclines on a couch, supported on her left elbow. Her right hand lies across her body holding a wreath. A man sits at the foot of the couch wearing a mask. He holds a wreath in his left hand and supports his chin on the other. On the space beneath the couch, there is on the mould the inscription *Comedia Pylades*, that helps us better identify the scene as pertaining to comedy and theatre performance.²⁵

A clay relief lamp (Fig. 9)²⁶ from Egypt of Roman Imperial times in the Benaki Collection of the National Archaeological Museum in Athens has the form of a small boat; the word *Nike* (Victory) is inscribed on its underside as a good wish for its owner. A composite clay lamp of the Roman period in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston bears a terracotta male figure, in *chlamys*, with an open scroll on his knees. Letters have been impressed on the scroll by the lamp-maker, which (albeit meaningless in their line groupings), help us to identify the figure as that of a scribe or literate man.²⁷

Simple linear shapes inscribed or painted on terracotta figurines can be also meaningful. In the context of board-games, two terracotta groups,

²⁴ IG XII.8, 679. For the sculptural type of the old drunken woman see for instance RIDGWAY 1990, 337-338, pl. 174.

²⁵ GRANDJOUAN 1961, 58, no. 502, pl. 11, fig. 4; SIFAKIS 1966, 268-273.

²⁶ NAM Benaki Collection 1138. On its underside, the inscription NEIKH (Νίκη). On the inside surface of the high handle, a standing god with scepter, probably Serapis, in relief. A snake on either side of the god, on the edge of the disc. Unpublished.

²⁷ Boston, Museum of Fine Arts inv. no. RES.08.35b. Acquired by the Museum as a gift by Edward Perry Warren in 1908. The head of the figure is missing. <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/277551>.

one in the Louvre and one in the British Museum, represent figures employed in the *omilla* game. The board of the game is impressed on the base of the complex, divided in unequal parts, probably intentionally than otherwise.²⁸ There are also incised, impressed or painted motifs on terracotta figurines and other objects, such as game pieces, that are more difficult to interpret or investigate. One example is offered by the archaic clay die with the painted image of a male head that has been interpreted as a representation of *Palamedes*, inventor of dice games (Fig. 10; ca. 665-640 BC)²⁹. A number of clay dice from the Athenian Acropolis in the National Archaeological Museum bear painted floral and linear motifs, perhaps pertaining to dice throws or purely decorative, if multiple.³⁰



Fig. 10

4. Ludic birds and flowers

Let us now examine whether an image of a flower and that of a long-necked bird, probably a goose, can be meaningful in terms of social context vocabulary and especially in matters of chance or game-playing. A number of small objects in the form of feathers from plucked geese, found in Athens, Pompeii and other sites, especially the ones with Latin numbers inscribed on them, have been interpreted as gaming pieces. They are made from various materials, such as ivory, and based on their context data, have been dated to Roman times.³¹ One example is offered by the contents of a grave of the 1st century AD excavated at the site of the main building of the National Bank in Athens in 1865. Game items were deposited in this grave, in particular such as eleven natural knucklebones and nine ivory objects in

²⁸ For the terracotta group in Paris, Louvre CA 1734, see CARÈ 2019, 92-93, fig. 1. For the *omilla* game see Suet., *On Greek Games*, 1, 103 ed. J. TAILLARDAT; Poll., *Onom.*, 9, 102; Suda, *Lex.*, @ 92.

²⁹ NAM 19366: Attributed to the Ram Jug Painter. PAPASPYRIDIS-KAROZOU 1973, 55-65; MORRIS 1984, 89; SCHEFOLD 1993, 136-137, fig. 134; XAGORARI 1996, 13; ROCCO 2008, 144, 151, 255, no. BAr 14.

³⁰ On clay dice see also D. Paleothodoros in this volume.

³¹ LAMER 1927, 2015, § 58; ZERVOUDAKI 2007-2008, 232-233, no. 18, fig. 12 (NAM Chr 347 b); LAMBRUGO 2015, 87, nos. 6, 7, figs. 3, 4.

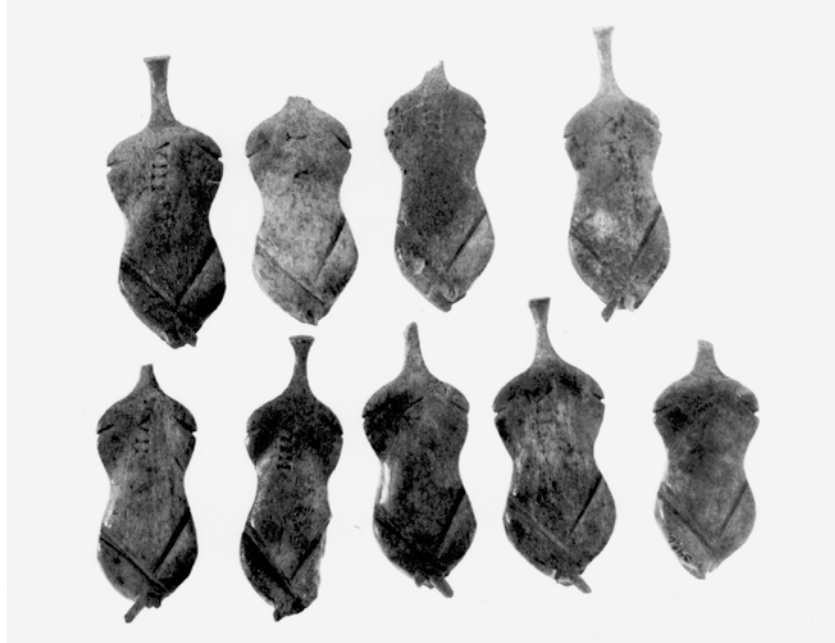


Fig. 11

the form of feathers from plucked geese (Fig. 11), interpreted as counters since they bear Latin numbers (I, III, VI, VII, VIII, VIII, X, XI and XII) inscribed on them. The grave, that most probably belonged to a woman of the elite class, also contained two ivory animal-shaped objects, two perforated crystal nuts, two crystal (*eikosaedron*) prisms and luxury items, such as gold rings and bracelets, gold leaves, two silver mirrors, a glass *pyxis* with decoration in relief and an ivory plaque with a relief representation of a Maenad.³² The existence of feather-type counters, such as those found in Athens and Pompeii, with inscribed numbers, indicates that some countable game elements or perhaps the counting of losses and winnings in games of Roman times could metaphorically refer to the plucking of feathers from a bird.

The bird depicted in the terracotta group NAM 4200 is very schematically drawn. We can however see its half-open wings that give us the impression of some movement. Since the terracotta group probably came from a funerary context, as opposed, for example, to a sacred deposit, it is difficult to interpret the bird as a symbol of a goddess or her attribute.

³² ZERVOUDAKI 2007-2008, 219-246. For the prisms see PLATZ-HORSTER 2017, 107-185.

Geese were connected to Athena and Aphrodite in Greece and Hera in Rome.³³ If we choose to adhere to a cultic significance for the bird image impressed on our terracotta group, we are then led to wonder why a simple terracotta figurine of a bird, or any number of such easily made terracotta figurines occasionally found in graves in Greece dated from Classical to Roman times, could not have served the funerary ritual and purpose with less trouble and much faster. Even if we cannot exclude an interpretation of the bird image as a symbol of femininity based on its cultic connections to Aphrodite and Hera, one wonders what relation(s) this symbolic image might have had to the game scene of our terracotta group.

In game vocabulary on the other hand, as well as in relative iconographic examples, such as the one presented by our terracotta group NAM 4200 itself, one can suggest a number of possible interpretations for an image of a bird. The image could be seen as casual, meaningless or jocular. These interpretations would however best suit declarations in the form of graffiti and not accord well with the category of impressed and purposeful manufacture signs. In symbolic game language, an interpretation of the image of the bird on the terracotta group NAM 4200 as a victim of exploitation, as a plucked bird, is not impossible. The act of plucking feathers from a live being (or metaphorically gaining counters from an opponent) seems appropriate for the rivalry shown in the terracotta group, at least till proven otherwise by other, new or unknown, inscribed examples. The concept of plucking feathers from a domestic bird cannot mean anything but bad luck and defeat for the victim.³⁴ Aristophanes uses the plucking of bird-feathers as a metaphor for embarrassment and defeat and later comic poets, as well as other sources, refer to whole geese or edible delicacies from these birds served at luxurious *symposia*.³⁵ Pliny informs us that an income can be made

³³ Geese in association with Athena and Aphrodite in Classical Athens and with Hera in Rome: Ov., *Met.*, 8.684-685; VILLING 2008, 171-180. Geese were also sacred to Osiris and Isis; see Paus. 10.32.16; THOMPSON 1868, 193-195.

³⁴ Domestic geese: Od., 19.536-537; Pl., *Plt.*, 264 c; Kratinus, frg. 49 [Ath., *Deipn.*, 384 c]. See also DALBY 2000, 109-110. The marrow or delicate inner part of geese (*anseris medullula*) is mentioned by Catull., 25, cf. *Priap.* 64.1. Sacred Roman geese gave warning of the approach of foe and saved the Capitol during the First Sack of Rome in 390 BC: Ov., *Met.*, 8.684-685; Livy, 5.47; Plut., *Camillus*, 27; Lucr. 4.673. Geese were plucked while live, for effective preservation of their feather hues: *Punch*, a 19th c. issue, *The Guardian*, 14.01.2016.

³⁵ Ar., *Av.*, 284-286, 520-521; Eub., frg., 110; Hor., *Sat.*, 2.8.88; Ath., *Deipn.*, 3.126e. See also DALBY 2000, 109-110, 388, n. 37; WILKINS – HILL 2006, 43. Geese were also served in priestly meals in Egypt: Hdt., 2.37.4.

from the sales of white-goose feathers and that these birds were plucked twice a year in some regions.³⁶ In our eyes, plucking feathers from a live bird or skinning a live animal is an appallingly inhumane act, yet one myth concerning the satyr Marsyas refers to this procedure as the agreed punishment for the loser in the musical competition between him and Apollo.³⁷ In all periods, the act of declaring a victory and proclaiming dominance over a defeated opponent can take various forms.

Flowers and vegetation symbols have also been connected to symbolic language and floral motifs are not unknown in assemblages of game items. Wishes for one's good luck or the clumsiness of the opponent could be made explicit in game playing by inscriptions on counters. Counters, *tesserae* and other game pieces, some inscribed with words pertaining to victory or clumsiness are known from many sites.³⁸ A number of inscribed Roman game pieces are housed in the British Museum in London.³⁹ Examples of round clay counters in flower-form come from Corinth. One counter was made from the central part of a relief bowl underside, which was decorated with a rosette, and belongs to the Hellenistic period. A couple of late Roman or Byzantine counters from the same city are made of bone cut in rosette form, a shape common in this period.⁴⁰

Aphrodite, among all Olympian goddesses, was the one most associated with roses⁴¹ and lucky charms. According to the lyric poet Anacreon, the white rose first sprang forth during the birth of Aphrodite.⁴² The myth of the tragic death of Adonis, Aphrodite's mortal lover, with the goddess's grief over it, also involves a rose, anemones and other flowers.⁴³ In ancient Greek art, Aphrodite and Eros are often depicted in association with gardens and flowers. In Classical Athens, Aphrodite was worshipped

³⁶ Plin., *HN*, 10.27.

³⁷ Pl., *Euthyd.*, 285d; Diod. Sic., 3.59; Paus., 2.22.9; Ov., *Met.* 6.382 ff.; Apollod., *Bibl.*, 1.4. For the Mantinea reliefs that depict the contest of Apollo and Marsyas, in the company of Muses, see for instance KAROUZOU 1974 [1968], 167-168; CORSO 1988, 141, 164-169; STEWART 1990, 277-279, figs. 492-494; RIDGWAY 1997, 206-209.

³⁸ For rectangular *tesserae* inscribed with Latin numbers and words, such as *Fortunat*, see CECCHINI 2015, 67-70.

³⁹ JENKINS 1990, 30-37, fig. 36 (one illustrated object is Minoan, most of the other game pieces are of the 1st - 2nd c. AD).

⁴⁰ DAVIDSON 1952, 220-221, nos. 1704, 1705, 1730, pl. 99.

⁴¹ KINSLEY 1989, 189-190.

⁴² Anac. *Eiς τὸ ρόδον*.

⁴³ Bion, *Adonis' Epitaphius*, 10-11, 65, 75-76.

at a sanctuary in the Gardens, an area probably located to the southeast of the Acropolis, near the river Ilissos. A famous statue of the goddess by the sculptor Alkamenes graced this sanctuary.⁴⁴ Another sanctuary of the goddess was on the north slope of the Acropolis.⁴⁵ In Roman times, Venus-Aphrodite was considered as protector of the gardens in Pompeii. In Classical and Hellenistic Greece, Aphrodite *Pandemos* was also connected to symbolic representations of stars.⁴⁶

In Greek and Roman antiquity, Aphrodite was connected to the best game luck and her name was given to the highest throw of knucklebones. *Golden Aphrodite* was an eponym of the goddess attested by the ancient sources and it probably came to represent a household name among board-game players for a very good throw of the dice.⁴⁷ The worst throw was on the other hand associated with the dog.⁴⁸ To sum up, roses or stars have in all times been considered lucky charms and Aphrodite was often represented in connection to these motifs. A clay flower of the Hellenistic period with a relief representation of Aphrodite, from Attica, in the Louvre Museum, and another one of the 2nd century BC, with a child Eros figure, from Crete, in the National Archaeological Museum (Fig. 12), may serve as examples.⁴⁹

If we accept the claim that the images of a bird and a flower of our terracotta group NAM 4200 are not casual or random, can we trace one metaphor that would combine both images in a game context? We revise some general data on the images: Plants, such as roses, and fowl birds, such as geese, were and still are obviously familiar sights to people living in rural areas in the Mediterranean and other parts of the world.⁵⁰ Agriculture and animal husbandry were parts of everyday life from ancient to pre-modern

⁴⁴ Paus., 1.19.2. See for instance GOETTE 2001, 101-102; HAVELOCK 2007 [1995], 109; ROSENZWEIG 2007 [2004], 29-44; SALTA 2015, 317.

⁴⁵ See for instance BRONEER 1960, 54-67; BURKERT 1993, 473; DALLY 1997, 1-20; GOETTE 2001, 41-42, 54.

⁴⁶ Cult of Aphrodite: BURKERT 1993, 324-331, 374-375. Aphrodite and stars: KNIGGE 1982, 153-170.

⁴⁷ Χρυσή, πολύχρυσος Ἀφροδίτη: *Il.* 5, 427; Hes. [Sc.] 1; Hes., *Theog.* 822; Diod. Sic., 1.97. Cf. Aesch., *Supp.* 555. See PAULY's *RE*, 2732, 2748, 2763-2765 (F. Dümmler). The luckiest throw of the dice was also called Midas, after the very wealthy king of the Phrygians: Tyrnt., 12.6; Eub., frg. 58; Luc., *Merc. Cond.*, 20.

⁴⁸ Poll., *Onom.*, 9, 100 (as with knucklebones); Prop., 4, 8, 46; Ov., *Tr.*, 2, 474; Suet., *Aug.*, 71; cf. Isid., *Orig.*, 18, 65.

⁴⁹ Louvre: BESQUES 1971-1972, 6, no. D 20, pl. 6 b (2nd to 1st c. BC). NAM 6063; PAPA 2014, 209-220.

⁵⁰ See, for instance, the comedy scene with fat birds (geese) attacking cooks on the Corinthian red-figure calyx krater NAM 1391, from Boeotia, dated in 380-370 BC: AVRONIDAKI 2007, 30. For images of rural life on vases see MALAGARDIS 1988, 95-134.



Fig. 12

times. Flowers have almost always won people's admiration and are often connected to celebratory or memorable events. Geese, as fat domesticated birds, seem to have been connected to metaphors of exploitation from ancient to pre-modern times. Bird feathers and especially the ones from geese were used till pre-modern times for filling up pillows and mattresses and represented an economic resource that was widely exploited. The household chore of feather-plucking from live geese has been a subject of pre-modern paintings of village life.⁵¹ Even the word goose was used as a rather friendly but still pejorative term in English literature of the Renaissance, as well as of the Victorian period. A board-game named *Goose* was also played in England around 1700. This game has been known since the 16th century and comes from Italy.⁵²

Conclusion

Based on these different hypotheses, we suggest the following interpretations of the terracotta figurine group NAM 4200: the woman is probably represented protesting because the man has successfully captured her pawns that are hidden beneath her hand and arm and which she apparently does not want to submit. This capture probably leads to the man's swift victory by a clever move. Another possible interpretation of the scene is that the female figure with outstretched hands is meant to admonish her competitor to wait for her to catch up with him, rather unexpectedly, thanks to a clever move she is about to make at the last minute. A number

⁵¹ The paintings by M. Liebermann, *Women plucking geese* (oil on canvas), 1871, in Berlin, Alte Nationalgalerie, and by A. Ancher, *Plucking the geese* (oil on canvas), 1904, in the National Gallery of Denmark may serve as examples.

⁵² Goose as a pejorative or playful term, cf. for instance W. SHAKESPEARE, *King Lear*, 2.2.90, *King Henry IV*, 3.1.230-233. For the goose game see for instance a game-board print dated ca. 1700 in S. Pepys Library in Magdalene College in Cambridge.

of Roman representations of two board-game players can serve as parallels: one of the players is depicted protesting and crying out *mora* (“wait”), as the Latin inscription on one of these artefacts testifies, as well as *tesserae* with the inscription *moraris*.⁵³ In either case, the female figure of the terracotta group NAM 4200 is shown in an awkward, if not losing, position. On the other hand, the male figure of the terracotta group has drawn himself away from the game-board as if satisfied with the result of his actions.

The game played involves counters, position moves, and strategic thinking and has therefore been identified with *Poleis*, as previous publications have shown. *Poleis* is the only game of this type that we know from ancient Greece. The game depicted in our terracotta group is certainly a board-game of strategy and the competitive player figures have been thought worthy of playful comment by the ancient terracotta artist or *coroplast*. The motifs, the bird and the flower, on the back of the playing figures can be seen as intentional and not random. They were impressed by the *coroplast* while the clay was still soft, as were the shallow lines of the game-board, and they were obviously not incised sometime after the manufacture of the terracotta group had been completed. The seated male figure can probably be identified as the winner of the game, implied as such by his aloof stance, his lack of gesturing and the flower (rosette) the ancient *coroplast* impressed on the back of his seat. The female figure may be identified as the (final or momentous) loser of the game by her vivid gesturing, her hiding of pawns, as well as the impressed and easily incised image of a long-necked, feathery bird, probably a goose, on the backside of her seat. The dwarf turns his admiring gaze upon the winner’s face and not otherwise. The maker of the early Roman terracotta figurine group NAM 4200 must have certainly pondered on the outcome of the game depicted in his artefact. Winning or losing a game, a case, a discussion argument, a chance to accomplish a plan or grasp a life-time opportunity was and still is a stimulating conversation topic in social life and communication networks. A random symbol inscribed on the back of a terracotta figurine could, in all probability, be interpreted as a playful comment from the *coroplast*, attempted in the spree of the moment before placing this and other of his ceramic products in the kiln. It is the juxtaposition of the two motifs, the bird and the rose, and their symbolic connotations, that lead to

⁵³ CECCHINI 2015, 67; ROWAN 2019, 84-85.

our tentative claim of a meaningful commendation on the outcome of the game, regarding the identification of its winner and loser. Since our terracotta group was probably found in a grave, a funerary interpretation of the scene could be also considered. The symbolism of life as a board-game was one familiar to the Romans, as literary sources and finds indicate.⁵⁴ One may as well cautiously add the well-known argument that a male person winning a game over a female one also accords with our views of a male-dominated world throughout ancient times. On the other hand, if we interpret the dwarf as a match maker, the whole game can be allegorically taken to symbolize a love affair between the two players, a bond the loss of which is lamented upon in a funerary context and adequately symbolized both by the bird and the flower. In any case, there is no reason to doubt that the game depicted on the terracotta group, as well as other board games of strategy or luck, were popular in large parts of the population in a big city such as Roman Athens or elsewhere. As this and other related finds suggest, in early Roman Athens, elite society members chose complicated and intellectual ways of spending their free time, and apparently, members of the craftsmen's milieu were able to follow up on gaming situations and attitudes and made grave goods that reflected on a popular pastime.

⁵⁴ WHITTAKER 2004, 297-299. See also DASEN – MATHIEU 2021 and U. Schädler in this volume.

Illustrations

Fig. 1. Terracotta group (H. 15 cm, max. W. 13.8 cm). Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. NAM 4200. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/ Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.RE.D.). Photo Eleftherios Galanopoulos.

Fig. 2. View of the game-board of the terracotta group NAM 4200. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/ Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.RE.D.). Photo Eleftherios Galanopoulos.

Fig. 3. The female figure of the terracotta group NAM 4200. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/ Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.RE.D.). Photo Eleftherios Galanopoulos.

Fig. 4. The impressed motif of a rosette on the back of the chair of the male player in the terracotta group NAM 4200. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/ Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.RE.D.). Photo Eleftherios Galanopoulos.

Fig. 5. The impressed and incised motif of a bird, probably a goose, on the back of the chair of the female player in the terracotta group NAM 4200. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/ Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.RE.D.). Photo Eleftherios Galanopoulos.

Fig. 6. Terracotta figurine (H. 11 cm, W. 5 cm, Depth 4.5 cm) of a player seated at a tripod table with game board. © Moirans-en-Montagne, Musée du Jouet, inv. 2003.18.1118 (CAN-2330). Photo Museum.

Fig. 7. Terracotta lamp group (H. 10 cm). Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. NAM 12424. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/ Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.RE.D.). Photo Spelios Pistas.

Fig. 8. Clay plastic jug (H. 25 cm). Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. NAM 2069. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/ Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.RE.D.). Photo NAM Photographic Archives.

Fig. 9. Clay relief lamp (H. 3.5 cm, L. 8 cm, W. 4.6 cm), in the form of a small boat. Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. NAM Benaki Collection 1138. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/ Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.RE.D.). Photo NAM Photographic Archives.

Fig. 10. Clay die (4.2 x 4 x 4.5 cm), with painted representation of a male head. Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. NAM 19366. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/ Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.RE.D.). Photo NAM Photographic Archives.

Fig. 11. Nine ivory counters (Max. h. 5.9 cm, max. w. 2.4 cm, max. thickness: 0.09 cm). Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. NAM Chr 347 b. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/ Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.RE.D.). Photo, analog digitized Stephanos Stournaras.

Fig. 12. Clay flower (Diam. 27 cm). Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. NAM 6063. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/ Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.RE.D.). Photo Irini Miari.

Abbreviations

DAGR = Daremberg C.V. – Saglio E. *Dictionnaire des Antiquités grecques et romaines*, Paris, 1877-1919.

IG XII.8 = Friedrich C. *Inscriptiones Graecae XII.8. Inscriptiones insularum maris Thracici, Lemnos, Imbros, Samothrace, Thasos, Skiathos (etc.) and Skyros*, Berlin, 1909.

RE = Pauly A. – Wissowa G. – Kroll W. (eds), *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft, Stuttgart*, 1893–1980.

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Catacomb games: reused game boards or funerary inscriptions?

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Abstract. Several marble slabs fashioned like game boards for *XII scripta/Alea* come from Christian catacombs in Rome. Often deliberately cut or fragmented, they were used as funeral slabs. The general opinion is that these game boards have found a secondary use in the funeral context. The present paper presents a critical discussion of this interpretation. The slabs differ in several details from real game boards. Moreover, the inscriptions often betray a distinctive funeral character. Game boards for this game consist of three rows of two groups of six squares, their structure thus being identical to the poetic form of a hexagram. It appears that in Late Antiquity, the hexagram was particularly popular as a formula for funerary inscriptions. Moreover, the symbolic meaning of the *XII scripta/Alea* game favoured its use in sepulchral contexts. It seems therefore that at least a certain number, if not most of these “game” boards, were produced as funeral slabs and never used before as game boards in the home of the living.

XII Scripta, Alea, Catacombs, Games, Circus, Christian, Funeral, Inscriptions, Reuse

Περίληψη. Αρκετοί μαρμάρινοι λίθοι διαμορφωμένοι ως πίνακες παιχνιδιού για το παιχνίδι των δώδεκα γραμμάτων/του κύβου (*XII scripta/Alea*) προέρχονται από τις χριστιανικές κατακόμβες της Ρώμης. Συχνά σκόπιμα θραυσμένες ή αποσπασματικές χρησιμοποιήθηκαν ως επιτύμβιες στήλες. Η γενική άποψη είναι ότι αυτοί

οι πίνακες παιχνιδιού βρέθηκαν σε ταφικά σύνολα σε δεύτερη χρήση. Το παρόν άρθρο παρουσιάζει μια κριτική συζήτηση αυτής της ερμηνείας. Οι λίθοι διαφέρουν σε αρκετές λεπτομέρειες από τις πραγματικές τράπεζες παιχνιδιών. Επιπλέον, οι επιγραφές συχνά προδίδουν έναν ιδιαίτερο ταφικό χαρακτήρα. Οι τράπεζες παιχνιδιού για το συγκεκριμένο παιχνίδι αποτελούνται από τρεις σειρές δύο ομάδων των έξι τετραγώνων, καθιστώντας έτσι την δομή τους πανομοιότυπη με την ποιητική μορφή ενός εξάμετρου. Είναι εμφανές ότι στην Ύστερη Αρχαιότητα η στερεοτυπική χρήση του εξάμετρου ήταν ιδιαίτερος δημοφιλής για επιτύμβιες επιγραφές. Επιπροσθέτως, η συμβολική σημασία του παιχνιδιού των δώδεκα γραμμάτων/του κύβου ευνοούσε την χρήση του σε ταφικά πλαίσια. Φαίνεται επομένως ότι τουλάχιστον ένας ορισμένος αριθμός, αν όχι οι περισσότερες από αυτές τις τράπεζες «παιχνιδιού», κατασκευάστηκαν ως επιτύμβιες στήλες και δεν χρησιμοποιήθηκαν ποτέ ως τράπεζες παιχνιδιού στα πλαίσια του οίκου των ζωντανών.

Δώδεκα γράμματα (XII Scripta), κύβος (Alea), κατακόμβες, παιχνίδια, υπόδρομος, χριστιανικός, επιτύμβιος, επιγραφές, δεύτερη χρήση

Riassunto. Numerose lastre di marmo in forma di tavole da gioco per il *XII scripta/Alea* provengono dalle catacombe cristiane di Roma. Spesso frammenti di tavole o esemplari deliberatamente tagliati sono stati impiegate come lastre funerarie. È opinione diffusa che l'uso di queste lastre di marmo in contesto funerario sia secondario. L'articolo propone una discussione critica di questa interpretazione. Le lastre differiscono in diversi dettagli dalle vere tavole da gioco. Inoltre, le iscrizioni spesso tradiscono un precipuo carattere funerario. Le tavole destinate a questo gioco consistono di tre file di due gruppi di sei quadrati; la loro struttura è quindi identica alla forma poetica di un esagramma. Risulta che l'esagramma fosse particolarmente popolare nella tarda antichità come formula per le iscrizioni funerarie. Inoltre, il significato simbolico del gioco del *XII scripta/Alea* favorì il suo utilizzo in contesti sepolcrali. Si conclude, quindi, che almeno un certo numero di queste tavole "da gioco", se non la maggior parte, siano state prodotte come lastre funerarie e non siano mai state utilizzate prima come tavole da gioco nella casa dei vivi.

XII scripta, alea, giochi, catacombe, circo, cristiano, funerale, iscrizioni, reimpiego

Introduction

Numerous marble slabs inscribed in the shape of a game board for *XII scripta/Alea* – and only *XII scripta/Alea!* – are attested in Christian catacombs in Rome. Often deliberately cut or fragmented, they were used as funeral slabs.¹

The general opinion is that these game boards have found a secondary use in the funeral context. For example, in his *La Roma sotterranea Cristiana*, Giovanni Battista de Rossi repeatedly used the formula of a “*tavola lusoria*” “*tagliata*”, “*segata*”, or “*adoperata*” “*per chiudere un loculo*”,² thus indicating that these boards were cut in order to close a burial niche. Max Ihm,³ who first produced a catalogue of those game boards, wrote: “*In den christlichen Begräbnisstätten Roms sind Bruchstücke von Spieltafeln häufig zum Verschluss der loculi benutzt worden*”. Antonio Ferrua was convinced:

*che si tratti semplicemente di tavolieri posseduti e usati da antichi cristiani, e poi in mancanza di meglio adoperati a chiudere le bocche dei loro sepolcri nelle catacombe, come una lastra marmorea qualsiasi*⁴

He dismissed theories of these boards having an ornamental or symbolic value or a distinctive function but argued in favour of a purely pragmatic reason for their employment as gravestones.⁵ This view is also shared by Anita Rieche,⁶ and Nicholas Purcell speaks of a “catacomb reuse phenomenon”.⁷ Recently, Raffaella Giuliani described the presumed reuse of these game boards as follows:

*dovevano essere appartenuti in vita ai proprietari delle tombe in cui furono impiegati, tavole da gioco che si trovavano nelle case, in tutte le case, e che tornavano estremamente utili – per dimensioni, forma e materiale – quando il proprietario passava a miglior vita, e i suoi cari si trovavano nella necessità di provvedere ai bisogni della tomba.*⁸

¹ This article is part of the project “Locus Ludi. The Cultural Fabric of Play and Games in Classical Antiquity” based at the University of Fribourg. It is funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement no 741520), <https://locusludi.ch>.

² DE ROSSI 1877, 170, 374, 376, 383, 391, *passim*.

³ IHM 1890, 223-239, in part. 228; completed in IHM 1891, 208-220.

⁴ FERRUA 1948, 56.

⁵ FERRUA 1947b, 495-499.

⁶ RIECHE 2007, 88.

⁷ PURCELL 2007, 93-94.

⁸ GIULIANI 2013, 235.



Fig. 1

12 squares, every row arranged in two groups of six squares by a dividing symbol in the middle, so as to form what in modern backgammon is called the “bar” (Fig. 1). In his *Etymologies* (or *Origines*), Isidore of Seville († April 4, 636) gives a fairly detailed description of this type of game board. He states that the players:

argue that these rows are divided into six places because of the human ages and in three lines because of the tenses. And therefore, they say that the board is arranged in three lines

[...] *sed et ipsas vias senariis locis distinctas propter aetates hominum ternariis lineis propter tempora argumentantur. Inde et tabulam ternis discriptam dicunt lineis*¹¹

The squares of these boards can be fashioned in the shape of squares, circles, strokes, symbols (leaves, double peltas, etc.) or letters, which often make up a hexagram, i.e., a sentence consisting of six six-letter words. Isidore calls this game *Alea*, but a general overview of this type of game board and the game related to it reveals that the board was identical to the one

⁹ SCHÄDLER 2013, 68. DASEN 2020, took up this idea. See also SCHÄDLER 2012, 22-23.

¹⁰ See already BRUZZA 1877, 81-99, esp. 82-83. Already DE' FICORONI 1734, 121, 122, 125-26, referred Isidore's description to this type of boards. For *ludus latruncularum* boards in pagan funerary contexts see DASEN-MATHIEU 2021.

¹¹ Isid., *Etym.*, 18.64.

used for the *Ludus duodecim scriptorum*.¹² Carefully executed marble gaming tables, of in some cases monumental size, dating to the 3rd to 6th centuries AD have been found in Aphrodisias, Ephesus, Sagalassos, Kibyra, Laodiceia ad Lycum, Perge, Kos, Halicarnassus¹³ and elsewhere.¹⁴ Often, they were put up in public places or buildings, and even dedicated by officials of the city. Some inscriptions on game boards contain prayers to God or Jesus, such as the Gruterus board,¹⁵ a fragmented board from San Sebastiano,¹⁶ the board from Carşamba and a *XII scripta/Alea* board from Ghawr es-Safi (Jordan).¹⁷ A board, found in the catacombs of SS Marcellino e Pietro, which says “[*te*] *mpus laetum / [pa]sto[r] cantat / [..... ..]*”, features biblical scenes in the dividing symbols.¹⁸ These archaeological finds as well as several references in official church documents and other literary sources such as the Latin Anthology testify to the appreciation and popularity of the game, even in Christian times,¹⁹ a point we have to keep in mind.

One reason to question the view that these boards were originally used as game boards in the homes of Pagan or Christian families is a practical argument. Depictions of board game players as on the Etruscan bronze mirror in Milan, on the wall-painting in Salvius’ *caupona* in Pompeii,²⁰ on the *Xenia* mosaic from El-Djem, or on the Horses’ mosaic in Carthage,

¹² SCHÄDLER 1995, 73-98. Peter Talloen’s recent suggestion (TALLOEN 2018, 104 and 115) to distinguish between earlier inscribed boards for *XII scripta* and later abstract boards for *Alea* contradicts the archaeological record and is not convincing.

¹³ I have to thank Klaus Hallof and Signe Isager for pointing to me the unpublished finds from Halicarnassus and Kos, both with Greek inscriptions in the squares. The text of the Halicarnassus board (inv. n. of the Bodrum Museum: 6567), of which only the left part is preserved, reads “TABAIN [.....] / ΦΕΙΑΩΝ [.....] / [.]ONOC [.....]”. The inscription will be published in the *Corpus of Inscriptions from Halikarnassos*, to be edited by Jan-Mathieu Carbon, Signe Isager and Poul Pedersen, which is under preparation.

¹⁴ For Aphrodisias: ROUECHÉ 2004 (<http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/ala2004>), n. 68, 69, 70, 71, 238; ROUECHÉ 2007, 101; for Ephesus: SCHÄDLER 2019, 86-87; MERKELBACH 1978, 48-50 (the gaming table in question is NOT for the *ludus latruncolorum* but for *XII scripta/Alea*); for Sagalassos: TALLOEN 2018, 102-121; for Kibyra: DEMIRER 2015, 74-82; for Perge: MANSSEL 1967, 102, 106 fig. 5; for Carşamba: WÄELKENS *et alii* 1993, 107 n. 330; for Laodiceia: ŞİMŞEK 2014, 48-50 fig. 20.

¹⁵ CIG IV, 409 n. 8983. GONCALVES 2014, consulted January 31, 2015. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/mefra/2643>; DOI: 10.4000/mefra.2643.

¹⁶ FERRUA – BUSIA 2001, 153 n. 122.

¹⁷ POLITIS 2019, fig. 21.1a, 21.1b.

¹⁸ GIULIANI 2013 with reference to FERRUA 1968, 57-59 fig. 25, 65-66 fig. 30, and FERRUA 1970, 92-93 fig. 2, 4.

¹⁹ For the increasing acceptance of the game by the church in Late Antiquity see ZIEGLER 2018, 162-164.

²⁰ VI.14,35/36; MNN inv. 111482.

show that the players, while sitting on chairs or stools facing each other, used to keep the game board on their knees, a custom that can still be observed today in various parts of the world.²¹ These game boards were certainly made of wood and a few examples, fragments or traces of such wooden boards, have come down to us.²² However, marble game boards like those from the catacombs are certainly not appropriate for this. Firstly, simply because they weigh too much. The more complete boards in Ferrua's catalogue, of which also the thickness is indicated, usually measure ca. 30-80 cm by 50-110 cm by 2-3 cm. If one applies the specific weight of Carrara marble of 2'700 kg/m³, the average weight of such boards lies between 20 and 50 kg! Secondly, the marble boards lack the raised rim that not only wooden boards such as the game board from Qustul or the boards from Vimose have, but also marble gaming tables for *XII scripta/Alea* such as those mentioned above from cities of Asia Minor,²³ which prevents the dice from falling off the board. The ergonomic characteristics of the catacomb marble boards – the weight and the absence of a raised rim – alone nourish doubts about their supposed primary function as game boards.

Designs and inscriptions

Let us now turn to the design of these boards. The first evident case, of which, however, a funerary context is not attested, is a board found on the Quirinal hill in Rome, whose inscription expresses the wish “that Sabbati(u)s may win” (Fig. 2).²⁴ The words are arranged in a similar way as the hexagrams of the game boards. The first and upper line has, on the left of a circle as a dividing symbol, “SAB”, and on the right side “BIN”. The second

²¹ Pompeii: PRESUHN 1892, Abtheilung V, pl. V and VI; PRESUHN 1878, unnumbered table; RITTER 2011, 155-200, pl. 7, 1. 3; SCHÄDLER 2013, 39; El Djem: CHARLES-PICARD 1952, 156-157 pl. 9; DUNBABIN 1978, 260-261 no. 28; YACOB 1996, 138, 210 fig. 105 (Inv. 3197); BALMELLE *et alii* 1990, pl. 13 and passim; Carthage: SALOMONSON 1965, 24-25 pl. 58 (1); DARMON 2003, 106-118. See SCHÄDLER 2016, 520. Two players have a game board with a dice tower on their knees on a magical gem dating to 2nd c. AD: DASEN 2020b.

²² See e.g. Stanway: SCHÄDLER 2007. For Qustul: EMERY – KIRWAN 1938, 345-346. fig. 111, pl. 87; EMERY 1948, 46 pl. 8 and 32a. For Vimose: ENGELHARDT 1869, 11-12 pl. 3, 9-11. For a general discussion see SCHÄDLER forthcoming.

²³ See ROUECHÉ 2004, SCHÄDLER 1995. Perge: MANSSEL 1967, 102, 106 fig. 5. Sagalassos: TALLOEN 2018.

²⁴ IHM 1891, 218; FERRUA 1946, 60-63; FERRUA 1948, pl. 1.2; FERRUA – BUSIA 2001, 123 n. 94. The name Sabbatius is also mentioned on another slab (FERRUA 1948, pl. 1.3; FERRUA – BUSIA 2001, 124 n. 95).

line reads “BATIC” and, separated by an “x”, “CAS”, giving the acclamation “*Sabbatie vincas*”, while the third and lower line of the board is decorated by one long palm branch as a symbol of victory. The difference to the game boards is threefold: firstly, the words do not read horizontally (one would expect *Sab o batis / bin x cas* or *Sabbatis o bincas*), secondly, the number of



Fig. 2

letters does not correspond to the required number of cells, and finally the palm branch is not divided into two parts. However, the dividing symbols of the upper and the central row are typical for the *XII scripta/Alea*-boards and therefore clearly show the reference to this type of game. The familiar hexagram structure of the *XII scripta/Alea* boards was used to design the acclamation. The spectators in the circus used to welcome and encourage the charioteers with acclamations like this. Considering that *XII scripta/Alea* was a race game, it may be relevant to note that Dionysius Areopagita (6th c. AD) uses the metaphor of a race and struggle for victory in Christian terms as a symbol of the efforts of his fellow Christians to gain eternal life in heaven: he speaks of a “goal of divine contests” (τέλος ἱερῶν ἀγώνων), “the goal of their most divine course” (πέρας θειοτάτων δρόμων), of “the goal crowned with victory” (τὸ νικηφόρον τέλος) and even of “the bequest of holy wreaths of victory” (στεφάνων ἱερῶν).²⁵

Dionysius is neither the first nor the only one to use such agonistic metaphors.²⁶ The apostle Paul and, following him, John Chrysostom (4th c. AD) also drew on the image of athletic competition and spectacle.²⁷ Talking to his Greek audience about baptism, Chrysostom speaks of life before baptism as a period of training and exercise (παλαίστρα καὶ γυμνάσιον), while from the day of baptism on it would become an agon (ἀγὼν) and wrestling (παλαίσματα) in the stadium (στάδιον) under the eyes of spectators seated above (θέατρον ἄνω κάθηται). Recently, Lynda Coon and Kim Sexton have convincingly argued that the importance in

²⁵ Dion. Areopagita, *De eccl. hier.*, 7.1 § 1 and 3.

²⁶ See recently PUK 2014, 45-48 with bibl. references in note 149.

²⁷ See JONES 2011, 321-338, esp. 322, with reference to WENGER 1970, 155.

Christian theology of the circus as an image for the kinship of Christian martyrs and charioteers even found an architectural expression through the so-called “circus basilicas”, constructed since the mid-4th century within the cities of the dead.²⁸ By the time that the game boards were in use in the catacombs, this rhetoric of Christ’s athletes striving for victory in a public competition was an established concept.²⁹ I would suggest therefore that the acclamation “[...] *vincas*”, commonly used to encourage the *aurigae* or *venatores* in the circus, may have been used here in Christian terms to congratulate the deceased Sabbatius, who already achieved what the others were aiming at. Of course, it is tempting to assume that the Sabbatius of the game board is identical with the *venator* Sabatius on the gladiator mosaic from Torrenova in the Galleria Borghese.³⁰ Be that as it may, one further aspect might be worth mentioning here: As Laurence H. Kant has argued, the name Sabatius or Sabbatis, of Jewish origin, seems in some cases to indicate Christians³¹, which is very likely true for the Sabatius of the game board.

The circus is alluded to in several game boards from the catacombs and elsewhere, with formulas such as “*CIRCVS PLENVS / CLAMOR MAGNVS*” in some cases followed by the usual acclamation “[...] *vincas*” or “[...] *vinces*”.³² The common opinion is that this reference to the circus is meant as a comparison of the chariot races with the race game type of the game,³³ an idea that might find a certain support in the representation of *XII scripta/Alea*-players in the background of one of the panels of the Horses’ mosaic in Carthage. However, it is not unlikely that the allusions to the circus in the game board inscriptions, positive as they are, have a Christian background and meaning, as in the case of Sabbatius. Richard DeVoe has shown that, in contrast to the condemnation of the circus and the chariot races in the writings from Tertullian and other earlier Christian and patristic authors, by the late 4th century, Christians attended the games in

²⁸ COON – SEXTON 2020.

²⁹ JONES 2011, 335.

³⁰ The extensive literature is summarized by Giulia Ciccarello, in an article entitled “Mosaico pavimentale con gladiatori e cacciatori”: <https://galleriaborghese.beniculturali.it/opere/mosaico-pavimentale-con-gladiatori-e-cacciatori/> (retrieved August 17, 2021).

³¹ KANT 1987, 706-707; RINALDI 2009, 131 n. 207.

³² See FERRUA – BUSIA 2001, 111-122 n. 83-93. On the circus races in general see recently BELL 2020 with bibliography.

³³ RIECHE 2007, 88.

increasing numbers, supported and perpetuated them. When, after the 4th century, the original religious aspects of the games had taken a back seat, the circus races flourished even when Rome was already Christian, especially in the major cities.³⁴ In Imperial times, the audience in the circus represented Roman society and in Late Antiquity several authors, even Christians, describe the circus as an image of the world.³⁵ It is not impossible to assume that in the Christian logic of life, death and resurrection, the spectacle Paul had alluded to (1 Cor. 4:9), could best be imagined as the “*circus plenus*” and understood as the spectacle uniting the Christian community, the living as well as the angels.³⁶ And with “*clamor magnus*”, “*ingens*” or “*mirus*”, the community encouraged and applauded as “*victors*” those who had reached the goal of “the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” as Paul put it (3 Phil. 14). The circus inscriptions on the “game” boards from Christian funeral contexts may therefore find a better explanation in their religious significance, than in the comparison of board game and chariot races, the more so if we assume that the boards were not produced as real game boards used at home, but as objects intended for a sepulchral function.

Another slab comes from the cemetery of Ciriaca at San Lorenzo and is now kept in the Museo Lateranense (inv. 32977, Fig. 3).³⁷ The inscription consists of a few letters disposed in three lines at the left and right of three dividing symbols typical for *XII scripta/Alea* boards. It reads:



Fig. 3

³⁴ DEVOE 2002, 16. PUK 2014, 161-228. Circus races became a metaphor of competitive spirit even for children, as depictions of children or cupids performing races (with wheels or with chariots) on sarcophagi and mosaics attest. But it is outside the scope of this article to trace in detail the popularity of the circus races and its importance in Late Antiquity. For sarcophagi see SCHAUBENBURG 1995 and HUTCHINSON 1996, 16-20, 89.

³⁵ FRIEDLÄNDER 1920, note 40: Tert., *De spect.*, 9, Goripp., *In laud. Iust.*, 1.314sqq.; Cassiod., *Var.*, 3.52; Lydus, *Mens.*, 4.30; *Anth.Lat.*, 197R.

³⁶ WENGER 1970, 155.

³⁷ ICUR 19350. FERRUA – BUSIA 2001, 48 n. 24; for a photograph see MARUCCHI 1910, 65 and pl. LXXII.12.

[F?]LES (semi circle) EI
 ETCI (circle with 6-petaled rosette) TO
 VICI (semi circle with leaf) TE

This gives for the two lower lines *et cito vici te* (“and quickly I beat you”), while the first word in the upper line might read *fles* (“you cry”) according to Luigi Bruzza.³⁸ While for Bruzza the board measuring 29.5 × 46 cm is complete, Ferrua was of the opinion that the board as preserved is fragmented and that circles or palmettes indicated the missing letters to make a complete game board of three rows with twice six squares. However, if a complete game board was intended, one might have expected to read *ETCITO* (circle) *VICITE*, since the number of letters in each row is six. This is why Bruzza concluded that it is a “*tavola intera ma secondo un diverso sistema*”. It seems to me that we have in fact to do with a complete inscription designed around the dividing symbols of a game board, in order to make the reference to the *XII scripta/Alea* boards evident.

Let us consider a further fragment, found in the catacombs of S. Callisto (Fig. 4).³⁹ The upper edge seems to preserve the original edge of the slab. Below, the inscription reads “[---]DALE (half circle) *DULC[is]*”. G.B. de Rossi completed the obviously female name at the left to “Pardale”, while Ferrua read “Dedale”, which would make a six-letter word. The half circle, here in a particularly elaborate form ending in spirals, is a typical dividing symbol of one of the outer rows of squares of *XII scripta/Alea*-boards.⁴⁰ So the fragment would preserve part of the upper row of such a game board.

De Rossi seems to have considered this fragment part of a funerary inscription. Maria Busia goes a step further stating that de Rossi “*la crede epitaffio funebre, che sia epitaffio a mo' di tavola lusoria*”, i.e., an inscription in the shape of a game board, although de Rossi did not say anything of the kind. In his 1964 article, Ferrua discussed the fragment in more detail. He argued, from traces of mortar at the left edge, that the slab was used in this fragmentary state to close the *loculus* of a child. This implies that the slab had had a primary use before. But which one?

³⁸ FERRUA 1948, 39 n. 100; L. BRUZZA, ms. Lett. III, 28, indicated by BUSIA (Ferrua – Busia 2001).

³⁹ DE ROSSI 1877, 331; FERRUA 1964, 27-28 n. 171 fig. 7m; FERRUA – BUSIA 2001, 177 n. 144.

⁴⁰ Comp. FERRUA – BUSIA 2001, 154 n. 123.



Fig. 4

A short search in the epigraphic database Clauss/Slaby (EDCS) results in hundreds of instances of *dulcis*, in particular within the *tituli sepulcrales*.⁴¹ In the form of “name *dulcis*” or “name *dulcis in pace*”, sometimes with “anima” added, the formula is used equally for men and women, children and adults. “Victoria / [du]lcis / in pace”,⁴² “Iovinu[s] / *dulcis in pace*”,⁴³ “Bonifatia du/lcis in pace”,⁴⁴ “Faustina / *dulcis in pace*”⁴⁵ from Northern Africa, or “Karitine *dulcis in pace*”,⁴⁶ “Iuliana / *dulcis*”,⁴⁷ “Florentia / *dulcis*”,⁴⁸ “Fulviane anima *dulcis*”,⁴⁹ and “Leo / anima *dulcis*”⁵⁰ from Rome stand for many other examples of this formula. Thus, the appearance of the word “*dulcis*” in an inscription suggests that it is likely to be a funerary inscription. More *tabulae lusoriae* with the word *dulcis* come from the catacombs.⁵¹ One wonders why someone would keep a game board with a funeral inscription on it at home for fun. It is more likely that we are dealing with a fragment of a former funeral inscription, which was designed in the form of a game board.

It is interesting to note that the formula *anima dulcis* also appears on some of the late-antique gold-glass cups.⁵² These cups come, as far as the

⁴¹ http://db.edcs.eu/epigr/epi_ergebnis.php. Accessed September 6th, 2019. From Rome come 501 inscriptions, 464 of which *tituli sepulcrales*.

⁴² EDCS-44100031.

⁴³ EDCS-63600365.

⁴⁴ EDCS-08601578.

⁴⁵ EDCS-08601591.

⁴⁶ EDCS-03900039.

⁴⁷ EDCS-38700533.

⁴⁸ EDCS-33101147.

⁴⁹ EDCS-39700306.

⁵⁰ EDCS-39900384.

⁵¹ FERRUA – BUSIA 2001, cat. n. 136, 146, 147, 186, 187?, 188?.

⁵² MOREY 1959, n. 3, 15, 18, 20, 26, 115 (“*anima dulcis*”) and n. 48, 90, 109, 310, 426 (“*anima dulcis vivas*” and/or “*pie zeses*”).

documentation attests, exclusively from funerary contexts, and not a few of them were found in the catacombs in Rome. There, they were often inserted in the still wet plaster sealing of *loculi* at the moment when the grave was closed. Whether or not these cups had a secular use before is a matter of debate. While Steffen Diefenbach argues for a primarily secular and only secondary use in the funerary context, Daniel Th. Howells is more cautious stating that the function of the gold-glasses, which often do not have functional shapes, “need not have been funerary in the first instance”.⁵³ Paul-Albert Février and recently Susan Walker on the contrary believe that the glasses were ordered specifically to be used once during the funeral.⁵⁴

This leads us to question what exactly happened during an early Christian burial. However, the funeral rites in Rome from the 3rd to the 5th century themselves are difficult to establish.⁵⁵ The more so since apparently there was no standardized ritual custom applied all over the Roman empire during the period in question. We will of course not expect Christian authors to recommend playing games during a funeral; they prefer to mention a procession to the grave, prayers, reading in the holy scriptures, and the singing of hymns and psalms. But some sources reveal that the funerals could have been rather cheerful events.⁵⁶ We read of people singing and dancing on the graves at Easter.⁵⁷ Moreover, funerary banquets, which could include a lot of drinking, were also held,⁵⁸ whether they were regarded as *refrigerium* associated with the eucharist or not.⁵⁹ P.-A. Février has shown the existence of rooms for banquets in the Roman catacombs, and banquets are frequently represented in wall-paintings near the graves.⁶⁰ Undoubtedly, in early Christian times, banquets were part of the funerals and commemorative rituals.

From what has been discussed so far, I am inclined to think that during such funerary banquets, the participants engaged in playing board

⁵³ DIEFENBACH 2007, 47-48; HOWELLS 2015, 60-61, with 101-102 n. 17, 119 n. 33, 124 n. 37, and 143 n. 53.

⁵⁴ FÉVRIER 1978, 166, 172; WALKER 2018, 131.

⁵⁵ PHILLIPS 2005, 214-15; VOLP 2002.

⁵⁶ Cyprian, *De mort.* 20; Dion. Areopagita, *De eccl. hier.*, 8 § 3.

⁵⁷ Basil of Caesarea, *Hom.*, 14.1.

⁵⁸ Paulinus of Nola, *Letter*, 13; Augustinus, *Mor. eccl.*, 1.75.

⁵⁹ DIEFENBACH 2007, 44-49.

⁶⁰ ZIMMERMANN 2012, 171-185; VOLP 2002, esp. 198-224.

games. Obviously, *XII Scripta/Alea* was the game preferred, or because of its popularity and appreciation or perhaps because of its symbolic meaning as a metaphor of time (past, present, future) and the ages of human life described by Isidore.⁶¹ In this type of game, the counters come into play at the start of the game, move around the board according to the unpredictable outcome of rolls of dice, and leave the board again at the end, which might have been regarded as an allegory of human life. We must not forget that not only game boards were found in the catacombs, but also other gaming material: Marc'Antonio Boldetti recorded dice and counters that had been inserted, as the gold-glasses, in the wet mortar — obviously after the banquet, when the grave was closed.⁶²

A slab in the Vatican Museum, also late antique, is particularly interesting:⁶³ six small circles in line accompany the funeral inscription of a girl named Marciana, who died at the age of only 8 (Fig. 5). There is too much empty space on the left of the circles to think of an incomplete game board. The circles seem rather to have been added, in order to refer to a game board. In this context it may be interesting to remember that Isidore of Seville explains in his *Etymologies* that on game boards for *Alea*, the division of the squares into six groups symbolized the six ages of human life, i.e. *infantia*, *pueritia*, *adolescentia*, *iuventus*, *adultus* and *senectus*.⁶⁴ The one group of six circles on the board would thus correspond to childhood, the first age of life, which Marciana had barely achieved. The board would therefore not simply have remained incomplete, but the girl's parents may have wanted to add one more piece of information to the funeral inscription by referring to the symbolism of the game of *Alea*. In a similar way, the parents of little boy Quiriacus, who lived only 1 year 6 months and 14 days during the second half of the 4th century, added six ×s in a straight line beneath his funerary inscription.⁶⁵

A slab consisting of several fragments closes a burial niche in the catacombs of SS. Marcellino e Pietro. It still retains two lines of a hexagram:

⁶¹ *Etymologies*, 18, 64.

⁶² BOLDETTI 1720, 406 pl. 4 n. 46, 48, 49 (dice), 509 pl. 5 n. 50, 53, 54 (dice); 512-513 pl. 6 n. 68 (counters); DE ROSSI 1877, 585-586.

⁶³ FERRUA 1948, 57, n. 131, pl. IV n. 14.

⁶⁴ See above note 61.

⁶⁵ MARUCCHI 1910, pl. LXXII, 50 and 66; ICUR VII, 18637.



Fig. 5

“*CAPTVS* (semi-circle) [*CL*]*AMAT* / *AVCVPS* (cantharus) *CAPTAT*” – “the captured weeps, the fowler makes a catch”.⁶⁶ According to A. Ferrua, the upper edge seems to be the original edge of the slab, while the lower edge supposedly bearing the third row of squares has been cut off, so that only two rows remained (measurements 19 × 69.5 cm). Between these two lines the funeral inscription “*Luxuri[ae or o][i]n pacaē*” (Luxuria or Luxurius rest in peace) has been inscribed by another hand.

Other *tabulae lusoriae* retain the complete hexagram or variants of it with the additional lines: *MERVLA CANTAT* (“the blackbird sings”) and *TVRDVS STVPET* (“the thrush is stunned”).⁶⁷ So, the hexagrams were composed of three out of the four lines *MERVLA CANTAT*, *TVRDVS STVPET*, *AVCEPS CAPTAT*, and *CAPTVS CLAMAT*.⁶⁸ The bird the fowler is aiming at is probably the thrush (*turdus*), while the blackbird (*merula*) served as decoy.⁶⁹ A. Ferrua argued that this verse would refer to the capture of a pawn and the complaint of the player concerned.⁷⁰ However, since the bird in antiquity was regarded as a symbol of the soul of the deceased, the verse that refers to a fowler who captures a bird may more likely refer to death that gathers life suddenly or in an unexpected moment, i.e. to a premature and untimely death, especially of a child. The image of the catching of birds appears also on children’s sarcophagi, dating to the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, roughly the same period as the *loculi*, which may corroborate our interpretation.⁷¹ One should also keep in mind that *Merula* as well as *Turdus*

⁶⁶ FERRUA – BUSIA 2001, 106 n. 79.

⁶⁷ FERRUA – BUSIA 2001, 101-109.

⁶⁸ A board, found engraved into a seat in the exedra of the Palatine stadium (IHM 1891, 212 n. 54; FERRUA – BUSIA 2001, 105 n. 78; EDCS n. 53300277) probably reads “*STVP[et turdus] / CANT[at merula] / CAPP[it auceps]*”.

⁶⁹ See VENDRIES 2009, 123-127. For birds: LUNCZER 2009, 106-108 (blackbird), 109, 110 (Wacholderdrossel, *turdus*, thrush) (http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/10154/1/Lunczer_Diss_Voegel.pdf); ARNOLD 2007, 161-62 s.v. *Kopsichos*, 42 s.v. *Brenthos*.

⁷⁰ FERRUA 1948, 24. FRIEDRICH 2002, 92, follows this opinion.

⁷¹ See VENDRIES 2009, 133-134. For the catching of birds in antiquity see also LINDNER 1973.

were proper names, so that these tabulae might even contain a more direct reference to the deceased, whose names unfortunately remain unknown to us. In her study of figurative slabs for loculi, Elisabeth Ehler points out the fact that on some slabs for persons named Leo or Leontia, the image of a lion was added as a direct illustration of the names.⁷² On the slab for Luxuria or Luxurius appears a cantharus, which serves as a dividing sign between the groups of six squares or letters of the supposed central row of squares. As dividing symbol for the *XII scripta/Alea*-game, the cantharus is exceptional, but it appears frequently on Christian tomb slabs, especially from the 390s through the 5th century.⁷³ Judging from the cantharus represented between two laurel leaves on a slab from the catacombs of San Callisto with the depiction of two trochus players, it might be understood as a symbol of victory, and more precisely of victory over death.⁷⁴ More often, however, the cantharus in early Christian art seems to stand for the *refrigerium*, the ritual meal in honour of the deceased. Anyway, the cantharus reveals that the *tabula lusoria* was designed for funeral use from the beginning.

Conclusion

We discussed a number of marble slabs with inscriptions, the layout of which corresponds to the shape of *XII scripta/Alea* game boards. In Late Antiquity and Early Byzantine times, *Alea* was a highly appreciated game, in fact, it is the only Roman board game for which elaborate marble gaming tables were produced and put up in public spaces and buildings. Several marble slabs of this type were used in Christian funerary contexts, especially in the Roman catacombs. Judging from a practical point of view to begin with, it is questionable that these boards were ever conceived as game boards for play in private homes. Due to their size and weight, marble slabs are very awkward to handle as game boards; at home, the use of wooden boards, although rarely preserved, was certainly the rule. On the wall painting from the Osteria della Via di Mercurio in Pompeii (VI 10, 1.19, room b), such a wooden game board is depicted placed on a small table.

⁷² EHLER 2012, 77.

⁷³ Comp. DE ROSSI 1877, pl. 30-31, 2; EHLER 2012, 90. A semicircle on a triangle on a board from the catacomb of S. Lorenzo (FERRUA – BUSIA 2001, 169 n. 137) may perhaps be interpreted as a stylized form of cantharus.

⁷⁴ BUCOLO 2013, 140, 145-46; DASEN 2018, 134, fig. 11.

And the person who chiselled the board into the surface of a marble table in the slope house 2, app. 7 in Ephesus, had a wooden board with attached bronze handles in mind.⁷⁵ It is therefore unlikely that the marble “game boards” from the catacombs were made and used for private play and reused in the catacombs only later.

In several cases, it is evident that the inscriptions do not make a game board but refer to it through certain elements, as for example the layout in three lines or the typical dividing symbols between the words. In other cases, I hope to have demonstrated that the use of certain words, symbols, formulas or themes such as the circus and the catching of birds have a decidedly funerary and specific Christian signification.

Moreover, the game itself without any additional inscription obviously could have a meaning for those who used them in the context of the burial of deceased members of the family. Several non-epigraphic “game boards” or boards with the squares marked by letters of the alphabet are attested in the catacombs. Of particular interest is the drawing of a game board incised in an unfortunately fragmented marble slab, showing that the image itself of the game could suffice.⁷⁶ Perhaps, they were understood as an allegory for time and human life, as Isidore related around 600 AD.

The slabs had often to be cut in order to fit the required dimensions of the *loculus*. This is due to the fact that the format of the *loculi* was normally more elongated than the usual *XII scripta/Alea* boards. Such clipping also destroyed the game board and detracted it from further use, whether or not this was an accessory intention. But the cuttings, the fractures, and the sometimes rather fragmented state of the slabs is presumably also the consequence of them having been reused several times within the catacombs.

More generally speaking, in Late Antiquity, the fusion of poetic work and play was further developed as a poetic concept.⁷⁷ That poetry was a game with words and metrics no longer remained a mere metaphor. Various poems have games as their theme, such as some epigrams about board games in the *Anthologia Latina*, Symphosios’ collection of *aenigmata*, or the epigram of Agathias about “Zeno’s game of tables”.⁷⁸ Poetic forms are compared with games, for example by Ausonius, who associates the Cento

⁷⁵ SCHÄDLER 2016, 519-523.

⁷⁶ ICUR IV n. 12238.

⁷⁷ For the following, compare now KÖRFER 2020, 315-333.

⁷⁸ *Anth. Lat.*, 70.182-185; *Anth. Lat.*, 281; *Anth. Pal.*, 9.482.



Fig. 6

technique with the *Loculus Archimedi* or *Stomachion*. Still other authors bring their works into a form inspired by games: Optatian (3rd c. AD) inscribes his poems in a gameboard-like grid.⁷⁹ This concept is also followed by the “*monosticha de ratione tabulae senis verbis et litteris*” of the so-called “*XII sapientes*”,⁸⁰ which imitate *XII scripta/Alea* game board slogans through their formal design as hexagrams. The *monosticha*, as well as a Greek hexameter about Palamedes, the presumed inventor of the game, given by Orion,⁸¹ reveal the popularity of the hexagram among poets at the time. In this context, a look at the funerary inscription *RIB I, 161 (CIL VII, 54)* is particularly interesting: the slab was once part of a monumental tomb plinth, later built into the medieval wall of the city of Bath. Unfortunately, the stone is lost, but several drawings of it exist, which, despite some differences in detail, betray the author’s efforts to bring the text into a hexagrammatic form. He did so by using ligatures and smaller sizes of letters (Fig. 6).⁸² What the reader should see was “*DEC COL*” in the first line on the left of an empty space and “*NAEGLEV*” on the right, and “*VIXIT AN*” on the left in the second line with “*LXXXVI*” on the right. As a result, the layout of the inscription in the fashion of two rows of two six-letter words corresponds to *XII scripta/Alea* game boards.

⁷⁹ On the *Carmina* of Publius Optatianus Porfyrius see ERNST 1991 and POLARA 2004 (Latin and Italian).

⁸⁰ FRIEDRICH 2002, 39-40 (text). Her commentary is mainly based on Austin’s publications of the 1930s, but ignores the basic study by SCHÄDLER 1995, and therefore does not add much to our understanding of the game.

⁸¹ Orion, *Etym.*, ed. STURZ 1820, col. 127,3, note 80 with ref. to RUHNKE 1789, 217b; FRIEDRICH 2002, 93; BAUMGARTNER 1981, comm. on *Anth. Lat.*, 82.1 R2; FERRUA – BUSIA 2001, 226 n. 193. Another Greek example is a board from Gigthis: FERRUA – BUSIA 2001, 233 n. 200 with bibl.

⁸² See the drawings in: HORSLEY 1732, 326 Somerseshire V; SCARTH 1864, 63 pl. XXII; LYSTER 1684, 455-457, fig. 1.

The “hexagrammatic” layout of the popular game perfectly satisfied the needs of such a ludic concept of poetry. This fusion of poetic form and game was not restricted to the sophisticated poetry of artists close to the imperial house. The sheer number of Greek and Roman *XII scripta/Alea* inscriptions, also on accessories such as the *turriculae*, reveal that the phenomenon established itself among “people of no account” too, as Agathias put it. Less talented poets adapted the wordings through compound spelling of words, a different orthography or by using ligatures, in order to fit into the 6×6 available spaces. Such everyday poetry comes from the middle of society, as the use of colloquial or even rude vocabulary, the use of dialect and spelling mistakes in the inscriptions betray. In conclusion, the “game board” inscriptions in the catacombs should be understood as literary imitations of *XII scripta/Alea* game boards, but not as “real” game boards once used in the homes of the living.

Illustrations

Fig. 1. *XII Scripta/Alea* marble gaming table, from Ephesus, Alytarchos Stoa. Selçuk Museum (photograph U. Schädler).

Fig. 2. Marble slab with inscription “Sabbatis bincas” (drawing after FERRUA 1948, pl. I.2).

Fig. 3. Marble slab with inscription “Et cito vici te”, from S. Lorenzo. Musei Vaticani (photograph Musei Vaticani).

Fig. 4. Marble slab with inscription “[Dae]dale dulcis”, from S. Callisto, cubicolo As, *ad papas* (after FERRUA – BUSIA 2001, p. 177 n. 144).

Fig. 5. Marble slab with inscription for Marciane. Musei Vaticani, Galleria Lapidaria (photograph U. Schädler).

Fig. 6. Funerary inscription. Lost, once in Bath, RIB I 161 (after J. Horsley, *Britannia Romana*, London, 1732, p. 326).

Abbreviations

CIG = *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*, IV, Berlin, 1877

CIL = *Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum*, Berlin, 1863-...

EDCS = Epigraphische Datenbank Clauss-Staby

(http://db.edcs.eu/epigr/epi.php?s_sprache=en)

ICUR = *Inscriptiones christianae urbis Romae septimo saeculo antiquiores, nova series*, vol. 4, Coemeteria inter vias Appiam et Ardeatinam, ed. A. Ferrua (S.I.), Città del Vaticano 1964.

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Une « triple enceinte » et l'inscription funéraire de *Agate filia comites Gattilanis* à Milan

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Abstract. The funerary slab of *Agate*, daughter of an Ostrogoth *comes*, dated to 512 AD, shows a hitherto unnoticed *tabula lusoria* or symbolic representation in the blank space below the inscription. The pattern, used for the game of Nine men's morris, is accurately incised, and not hastily scratched, in a central and visible position. Interesting questions arise: is the pattern a game board? Is it precedent, coeval or posterior to the funerary inscription? How could the presence of the design be explained in such a context? Could the Nine men's morris pattern have had a symbolic overtone, or is it just connected to a secondary utilization of the slab? These questions will be evaluated mainly through the reconstruction of the conservation history of the slab.

Tabula lusoria, symbolism, Nine men's morris, funerary stele, Milan, reuse

Περίληψη. Η επιτύμβια στήλη της Αγάτης, κόρης ενός Οστρογόθου κόμητα, που χρονολογείται το 512 μ.Χ., αναπαριστά στον κενό χώρο κάτω από την επιγραφή μια τράπεζα παιχνιδιού (*tabula lusoria*) ή μια συμβολική απεικόνισή της που είχε ως τώρα περάσει απαρατήρητη. Το μοτίβο που χρησιμοποιήθηκε για το παιχνίδι της τρίλιζας (*Nine men's morris*) έχει χαραχθεί με ακρίβεια χωρίς καθόλου βιασύνη σε κεντρική και περίοπτη θέση. Ενδιαφέροντα ερωτήματα εγείρονται: μήπως το μοτίβο αποτελεί τράπεζα παιχνιδιού; Είναι άραγε προγενέστερο, σύγχρονο

ή μεταγενέστερο της επιτύμβιας επιγραφής; Πώς θα μπορούσε να εξηγηθεί η παρουσία του σε ένα τέτοιο πλαίσιο; Θα μπορούσε το μοτίβο της τρίλιζας να έχει συμβολική χροιά ή απλώς συνδέεται με μια δεύτερη χρήση της στήλης; Αυτά τα ερωτήματα θα αξιολογηθούν κυρίως μέσω της ανασύνθεσης της ιστορίας της διατήρησης της στήλης.

Τράπεζα παιχνιδιού (*Tabula lusoria*), συμβολισμός, τρίλιζα, επιτύμβια στήλη, Μιλάνο, δεύτερη χρήση

Riassunto. La lastra funeraria di Agata, figlia di un *comes* ostrogoto, datata al 512 d.C., mostra una *tabula lusoria* o “triplice cinta”, fino ad ora passata inosservata, nello spazio vuoto sotto l’iscrizione. La “triplice cinta” risulta accuratamente incisa in una posizione centrale e visibile, non graffita in maniera frettolosa. Emergono interessanti domande: il motivo geometrico è servito come tavolo da gioco? Tale motivo è precedente, coevo o posteriore all’iscrizione funeraria? Come si potrebbe spiegare la presenza del disegno in un tale contesto? La “triplice cinta” potrebbe avere una connotazione simbolica o è semplicemente collegata a un utilizzo secondario della lastra? Questi interrogativi saranno valutati principalmente attraverso la ricostruzione della storia conservativa della lastra.

Tabula lusoria, simbologia, triplice cinta, mulino, stele funeraria, Milano, riuso

Introduction

L'objectif de cet article¹ est de faire connaître une possible *tabula lusoria* ou « triple enceinte »², qui n'avait jusqu'ici pas été identifiée, associée à une inscription connue depuis longtemps (Fig. 1-4).

À Milan, en 1783, les travaux d'aménagement d'une rue conduisant à Piazza Fontana, tout près du Duomo (Fig. 5), ont mis au jour une tombe contenant des ossements avec une inscription incisée sur la dalle de couverture en marbre³. Le texte et la datation de l'inscription ne présentent pas de problème particulier :

hic requiescit in pace
Agate, filia comites
Gattilanis, qui vixit
in seculo ann(os) pl(us) m(inus) XL
deposita est sub d(ie) III
nonas Sept(em)br(es) p(ost) c(onsulatam) Felices

Ci-gît en paix Agate, fille du *comes* Gattila, laquelle vécut dans ce monde plus ou moins quarante ans. Elle a été ensevelie le troisième jour avant les *nonae* de septembre (de l'année) suivant le consulat de Felix (3 septembre 512 de notre ère).

L'inscription nous apprend qu'Agate est la fille de Gattila, un *comes*, c'est-dire membre de l'entourage de l'empereur, dont le nom n'est connu

¹ Je remercie Claudia Lambrugo de m'avoir suggéré de présenter cette petite découverte milanaise, et Barbara Carè de m'avoir proposé d'envoyer ma contribution au XXI Board Game Studies Colloquium. Grâce à l'aimable invitation de Véronique Dasen, j'ai présenté à nouveau cette étude à l'Université de Fribourg dans le cadre d'un workshop du projet ERC *Locus Ludi* le 12 décembre 2018. Je suis reconnaissant à Véronique Dasen et à Ulrich Schädler pour les précieuses suggestions offertes à cette occasion, à ma collègue Annamaria Fedeli pour des renseignements de topographie milanaise, et aux marquis Brivio Sforza pour m'avoir permis de voir et de photographier l'inscription conservée dans leur palais en place Sant'Alessandro. Les photographies ont été réalisées par Luciano Caldera et Luigi Monopoli, photographes de la Soprintendenza per i beni archeologici della Lombardia, que je remercie pour leur collaboration amicale.

² Sur la *tabula lusoria*, ou « triple enceinte », voir BERGER 2004 et UBERTI 2012. Sur les hypothétiques *tabulae lusoriae* formées par une circonférence divisée en secteurs circulaires par des rayons, qui peuvent avoir une interprétation symbolique, voir TEJERA GASPAS 2011-2012 et récemment SCHÄDLER 2018 ; voir aussi B. Carè dans ce volume.

³ Sur cette inscription, voir CUSCITO 2016, 199-200, n° 197.



Figs. 1-4

que par cette inscription⁴. La défunte appartenait donc à un niveau élevé de l'élite ostrogothique ; née vers 472 apr. J.-C., quelques années avant la destitution par Odoacre de Romulus Augustulus, le dernier empereur romain d'Occident, elle meurt sous le règne du roi ostrogoth Theodericus. Elle est enterrée, comme nous le verrons plus loin, dans un des lieux religieux les plus importants de Milan dès l'époque paléochrétienne.

Conservée après sa découverte dans la salle capitulaire du Duomo, la dalle est ensuite passée, peut-être à l'initiative du collectionneur Carlo Trivulzio (mort en 1789)⁵, dans le palais de la famille Trivulzio de la place Sant'Alessandro, où elle est encore encastrée dans la paroi gauche du grand escalier qui mène du rez-de-chaussée au premier étage. C. Trivulzio est sans doute le plus important collectionneur milanais de la deuxième moitié du XVIII^e siècle ; son nom est notamment associé à une célèbre coupe en verre ouvragée, le « diatrète Trivulzio », aujourd'hui conservée

⁴ Sur le nom *Gattila*, voir FIEBIGER – SCHMIDT 1917, 111-112, n° 223.

⁵ Sur Carlo Trivulzio, voir BUONOPANE 2016 et RAMBACH 2017.



Fig. 5

dans le Civico Museo Archeologico de Milan. Bien que nous ne disposions pas de documents à l'appui de cette hypothèse, il est probable que don C. Trivulzio, qui appartenait à l'une des plus illustres familles de Milan, ait demandé aux autorités religieuses – et facilement obtenu – cette inscription pour sa collection.

1. Une « triple enceinte » inconnue

Le 30 septembre 2015, j'ai pu procéder à une inspection en tant que fonctionnaire archéologue du Ministère et grâce à l'aimable autorisation des actuels propriétaires du palais, les marquis Brivio Sforza, sur requête de Giuseppe Cuscito qui préparait le troisième fascicule des *Inscriptiones Christianae Italiae de Mediolanum*⁶, et qui nécessitait des vérifications sur l'inscription et de meilleures photos. Cet examen m'a permis d'identifier un détail qui semble avoir échappé jusque-là.

Dans la partie inférieure de la dalle, partiellement cachée par la balustrade de l'escalier, se trouve le motif gravé d'une « triple enceinte » de 26 cm sur 26 cm – avec trois carrés concentriques coupés au milieu des côtés par des lignes perpendiculaires, sauf l'élément intérieur. Le motif est soigneusement gravé à une certaine distance sous le texte inscrit et dans une position centrale. Il est généralement connu comme le plateau du jeu du moulin. Comment pouvons-nous expliquer la coexistence d'une « triple

⁶ CUSCITO 2016.

enceinte » et d'une inscription funéraire ? Pour essayer de répondre, au moins hypothétiquement, à cette question, il convient de réexaminer d'abord les quelques informations sur la découverte de la dalle qui ont marqué les premières tentatives d'interprétation du rapport entre texte et « triple enceinte ».

Immédiatement après la découverte, le père dominicain Giuseppe Allegranza (1713-1785), célèbre archéologue et érudit milanais, en rend un rapport assez précis. Voici son témoignage :

Negli scavi fatti pel riattamento della strada che conduce alla nuova Piazza della Fontana, ossia al Verzaro vecchio dalla parte della contrada de' Pattari è stata trovata il giorno 29. scorso un'urna sepolcrale, con entro alcune ossa, con una iscrizione incisa sopra lastra di Affricano bianco venato. Si crede con tutta la probabilità, che fino a tal luogo si estendesse il Cemeterio di questa Basilica Metropolitana detto Campo Santo, o anche meglio quello della Chiesa di S. Michele sub Domo⁷.

La tombe appartenait donc vraisemblablement à un cimetière qui se trouvait derrière le chevet de la cathédrale qui précède le Duomo gothique ou, moins probablement, près de l'église, aujourd'hui disparue, de San Michele *sub domo* ou *subtus domum* remontant au VII^e siècle apr. J.-C.⁸ qui devait son nom à la proximité de la *domus archiepiscopi*, c'est-à-dire de l'archevêché. L'église était donc plus tardive que l'inscription d'*Agate*. En l'absence d'autres documents, nous ne pouvons pas être certain que la dalle se trouvait à son emplacement originel, ni, à l'inverse, qu'elle fut réutilisée comme simple matériau de construction dans une sépulture postérieure.

G. Allegranza, ainsi que les autres spécialistes qui se sont intéressés à l'inscription, se sont principalement concentrés sur l'indication consulaire

⁷ *Vat. Lat.* 9094, feuille imprimée non numérotée entre ff. 275 et 276 : « Dans les fouilles effectuées pour l'arrangement de la route menant à la nouvelle place de la fontaine, c'est-à-dire le vieux Verzaro (*ancien marché aux légumes*), situé du côté du quartier de Pattari, on a découvert, le 29 novembre dernier, une urne sépulcrale, avec quelques os à l'intérieur, avec une inscription gravée sur une plaque de marbre africaine blanche veinée. On croit avec toute la probabilité que jusqu'à cet endroit s'étendait le cimetière de cette basilique métropolitaine appelée le Campo Santo, ou mieux encore celui de l'église de S. Michele *sub Domo* ».

⁸ L'église de S. Michele *subtus Domum* ou *sub Domo* était, comme son titre l'indique, près de la *Domus archiepiscopi* ou archevêché, et fut démolie au XIX^e siècle pour construire le palais de la Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo. Cf. Fig. 5, le palais entre la place derrière l'abside du Duomo et Via Pattari.

p(ost) c(onsulatum) Felices et sur le *comes* Gattila, par ailleurs inconnu. G. Allegranza, par exemple, cite diverses informations sur le consul Felix, en charge en 511, successeur de Boèce au consulat et mentionné à plusieurs reprises avec éloges dans les *Variae* de Cassiodorus. Sur la façon particulière d'indiquer la date, G. Allegranza donne comme parallèle une lettre du pape Symmachus aux chrétiens de l'Orient, datée *post consulatum Felicis viri clarissimi*⁹. Au sujet de Gattila, il se limite à observer que « *Del Conte Gattilane resta ancora da ritrovarsi qualche notizia più interessante* »¹⁰. Ni G. Allegranza, ni – pour autant qu'on le sache – aucun des autres spécialistes qui ont traité l'inscription, même ceux qui l'avaient certainement vue¹¹, n'ont mentionné la présence de la « triple enceinte » sur laquelle nous allons maintenant nous concentrer.

2. Datation

En premier lieu, est-il possible de dater la gravure de la « triple enceinte » sur la dalle ? On doit certainement exclure la période successive à la découverte de 1783, car depuis lors, l'inscription a été conservée dans des lieux sûrs : d'abord dans la salle capitulaire du Duomo, ensuite dans l'un des plus importants palais milanais, et dans ce palais, en un endroit où la dalle est partiellement cachée, de plus en position verticale. Il semble donc très vraisemblable que la « triple enceinte » était déjà gravée quand la dalle a été découverte. À ce stade, trois hypothèses sont envisageables.

Si la dalle a été réemployée dans une sépulture postérieure, le motif pourrait avoir été gravé à un moment impossible à déterminer entre son utilisation originelle dans la tombe d'*Agate* et son réemploi éventuel. Si l'inscription funéraire et la gravure sont contemporaines, une objection technique se présente, car l'inscription est formée de sillons nets, plutôt profonds et larges, tandis que la « triple enceinte » est incisée de lignes fines, presque griffées. L'inscription et la gravure n'ont donc aucune affinité dans leur exécution. Une troisième possibilité peut être envisagée : la « triple enceinte » pourrait être le premier élément gravé sur la dalle, lors de son emploi originel qui ne peut pas être plus clairement précisé, notamment

⁹ Symm., *Ep.*, VII (PL 62, coll. 61-64).

¹⁰ *Vat. Lat.* 9094, feuille imprimée non numérotée entre ff. 275 et 276 (« Du *comes* Gattila restent encore à trouver des informations plus intéressantes »).

¹¹ Selon la reconstruction proposée par CUSCITO 2016, 199-200, n° 197, la seule autre édition de l'inscription résultant d'une autopsie est celle de FORCELLA – SELETTI 1897, n° 170.

parce que l'emplacement actuel empêche d'évaluer l'épaisseur de la dalle (marche ? revêtement du sol ? seuil ?). Quand la dalle fut à nouveau disponible pour un réemploi funéraire, plutôt que d'abaisser légèrement et de polir toute la surface pour effacer le motif de « triple enceinte », on préféra le laisser en le transformant ainsi en une sorte de décoration et en tirant parti aussi de sa position équilibrée par rapport aux bords ; le soulignement en rouge des lettres de l'inscription rendait peut-être les mots beaucoup plus visibles, au détriment de la « triple enceinte » qui était gravée de lignes plus minces. En outre, ne connaissant pas la conformation de la tombe, nous ne pouvons pas exclure que l'inscription était la seule partie visible de la dalle et que le motif était couvert d'une façon qui nous échappe.

3. Une valeur symbolique ?

Si l'on admet que la « triple enceinte » avait une valeur symbolique, le motif et l'inscription ont pu être contemporains malgré les différences techniques que nous venons de souligner. Si nous préférons interpréter le carré comme une *tabula lusoria*, celle-ci a peut-être été tracée avant l'inscription funéraire, ou après celle-ci. Après tout, le réemploi de dalles ou blocs avec des *tabulae lusoriae* comme supports d'inscriptions ou, inversement, le réemploi d'inscriptions pour y graver des *tabulae lusoriae*, est un phénomène pour lequel nous pouvons citer divers parallèles. Les plateaux de *Duodecim scripta/Alea* qui ont servi de fermeture de tombe ou de *loculus* dans les catacombes de Rome ne sembleraient pas être toujours un simple réemploi mais pourraient avoir été conçus parfois pour un usage funéraire, selon l'hypothèse d'Ulrich Schädler, qui souligne l'existence de formes d'allusion au jeu avec une dimension funéraire¹².

4. *Tabulae lusoriae* et inscriptions en contexte funéraire

Quelques exemples sont présentés ci-dessous, une série qui ne prétend certainement pas être exhaustive, notamment parce que les publications épigraphiques, surtout dans le passé, étaient plus attentives au texte qu'à son support matériel et n'indiquaient parfois pas la présence de *tabulae lusoriae* ou d'autres détails. Le cas de l'inscription milanaise en est un bon exemple, car la « triple enceinte » n'a jamais été mentionnée, même dans

¹² SCHÄDLER 2013 ; voir aussi FERRUA 2001, 101-109 et U. Schädler dans ce volume. Sur les scènes de jeu de plateau sur des monuments funéraires romains, voir DASEN – MATHIEU 2021.

les publications de première main et elle est ainsi restée inaperçue jusqu'à son autopsy en 2015.

Il est possible de suggérer différentes relations entre les *tabulae lusoriae* – principalement des plateaux de *Duodecim scripta/Alea* ou bien plus rarement de « triple enceinte » – et leur inscription. Du point de vue de la disposition, dans une inscription opisthographique, la *tabula lusoria* peut être plus ancienne ou plus récente que l'inscription, en général funéraire, qui se trouve sur l'autre face, ou la *tabula lusoria* et l'inscription, plus ancienne ou plus récente, coexistent sur le même côté.

Pour les *tabulae lusoriae* qui coexistent avec des inscriptions, le corpus de référence est celui des *tabulae lusoriae* épigraphiques établi par Antonio Ferrua et publié – en réunissant ses articles antérieurs – en 2001, en le complétant avec d'autres exemples tirés de la bibliographie plus récente, sans être exhaustif¹³.

Parmi les inscriptions opisthographiques portant d'une part une inscription et de l'autre une *tabula lusoria* plus ancienne, nous mentionnerons :

- Une plaque de marbre de Trèves, portant d'un côté une inscription funéraire chrétienne datée du IV^e siècle, et de l'autre une *tabula lusoria* avec l'inscription *Virtus imperi | hostes vincti | ludant Romani*¹⁴.
- Une plaque de marbre provenant de la catacombe de Priscilla à Rome, portant d'un côté une partie d'une inscription funéraire datant du IV^e siècle, de l'autre une *tabula lusoria* avec l'inscription *Hostes victos | Italia gaudet | [ludi]te Romani*¹⁵.
- Une plaque de marbre provenant de la catacombe de Prétextat à Rome, avec d'un côté une inscription funéraire, de l'autre une *tabula lusoria* avec l'inscription *[-----] | veloci lusori | [-----]*¹⁶.
- Une plaque de marbre provenant de la catacombe de Saint Calixte à Rome, avec d'un côté une inscription funéraire, de l'autre une *tabula lusoria* avec l'inscription *Vitori palma | victus surgat | [l]udere nescit*¹⁷.
- Une plaque de marbre provenant de la catacombe de Saint Laurence, avec d'un côté une inscription funéraire, de l'autre un fragment de

¹³ FERRUA 2001.

¹⁴ FERRUA 2001, 21-22, n° 1.

¹⁵ FERRUA 2001, 24-25, n° 3.

¹⁶ FERRUA 2001, 45, n° 21.

¹⁷ FERRUA 2001, 49, n° 25.

tabula lusoria avec l'inscription : [---] *LES EI* [---] / [---] *et cito* [---] / [---] *vici te* [---]¹⁸.

- Une plaque de marbre provenant de Rome, avec d'un côté l'inscription funéraire d'un prétorien, de l'autre un fragment de *tabula lusoria* avec l'inscription : [*victus surgas*] vel [*da lusori locu*] / [*ludere*] *nescis* / [*idiota*] *recede*¹⁹.
- Une plaque de marbre provenant de la catacombe de Saint Laurence à Rome, portant d'un côté une inscription funéraire, et de l'autre un fragment de *tabula lusoria*, avec l'inscription [----- ?] / [*semper*] *ploret* / [*victus*] *ubique* / [-----] et avec, dans un cercle, à la ligne 2 : *Eufrata*, et, toujours dans un cercle, à la ligne 3 : *Opula*²⁰.
- Une plaque de marbre provenant de la catacombe des Saints Marc et Marcellien à Rome, portant d'un côté le monogramme christologique et une colombe picorant une brindille, et de l'autre un fragment de *tabula lusoria*, avec l'inscription [-----] / *OERTXANREOO* / [-----]²¹.

Parmi les inscriptions opisthographiques portant d'une part une inscription et de l'autre une *tabula lusoria* plus récente, citons :

- Un fragment de plaque de Rome, Via Portuense, portant d'un côté une partie du soi-disant *elogium Turiae, laudatio funebris* d'une matrone de l'âge d'Auguste, réutilisée au IV^e siècle pour graver une *tabula lusoria* dont restent les mots : *tabula l[udere] / queri[t] [---] / [-----]*²².
- Un bloc fragmentaire de Rome, portant une inscription honorifique datant du II^e-III^e siècle apr. J.-C., réutilisé, probablement au IV^e siècle, pour graver une *tabula lusoria* pour le jeu des *Duodecim scripta*²³.
- L'inscription funéraire d'un *equus singularis* (Rome, piazzale Labicano), réutilisée comme dalle, sur laquelle a été par la suite incisée une *tabula lusoria* pour le jeu du moulin²⁴.

Un autre exemple possible de plaque opisthographique avec une inscription funéraire d'un côté et une *tabula lusoria* de l'autre se trouve dans le

¹⁸ FERRUA 2001, 48, n° 24.

¹⁹ FERRUA 2001, 78, n° 52.

²⁰ FERRUA 2001, 188, n° 155.

²¹ FERRUA 2001, 205, n° 172.

²² FERRUA 2001, 37-38, n° 15.

²³ GREGORI 2014, 559-560, n° 1 et CRIMI 2014.

²⁴ C. LEGA, dans *Collezione Celio* 2001, 122-125, n° 35 A-B, cité dans CRIMI 2008, 1180, n. 27.

complexe de Sant'Ippolito all'Isola Sacra, si l'on accepte l'interprétation du carré divisé intérieurement en quatre parties de deux lignes orthogonales comme une *tabula lusoria* simplifiée pour le jeu du moulin²⁵.

Quant aux inscriptions dans lesquelles la *tabula lusoria*, plus ancienne, se trouve du même côté que l'inscription, signalons :

- Une plaque de marbre provenant de la catacombe des Saints Marcellin et Pierre à Rome, sur laquelle, entre les deux lignes survivantes d'une *tabula lusoria* (*captus [cl]amat / aucups captat / [-----]*), est gravée une inscription funéraire²⁶.
- Une plaque provenant de Rome, Via Salaria, avec la seule ligne restante (la ligne centrale, entre trois lignes) de la *tabula lusoria* (*[-----] / [p]astor cantat / [-----]*) gravée au bord d'une inscription funéraire écrite avec une rotation de 180°²⁷.
- Une plaque provenant de la catacombe de Saint Calixte à Rome, avec un fragment de *tabula lusoria* (*[-----] / ANOE / VVOEVO*) et la dernière partie d'une inscription funéraire²⁸.
- Une plaque provenant de la catacombe de la Via Ardeatina à Rome, avec une inscription funéraire au-dessous de la deuxième ligne (la ligne centrale) d'un fragment de *tabula lusoria*, dont il ne reste que le mot *utere[r]*²⁹.
- Une stèle funéraire de prétorien, de la Via Salaria, dans laquelle on peut encore voir les sillons de la *tabula*. Il semblerait que le lapicide qui a réutilisé cette dalle s'est laissé guider par des minces signes préexistants de la *tabula lusoria* (côté gauche du cadre, cadre tangent inférieur par rapport aux trois cercles principaux)³⁰.

Dans ces derniers cas, il est évident que le soulignement en rouge des lettres de l'inscription plus récente doit avoir joué un rôle fondamental pour les distinguer des lettres survivantes de l'inscription plus ancienne et des lignes de la *tabula*.

²⁵ FIOCCHI NICOLAI 1983, 161-162.

²⁶ FERRUA 2001, 106, n° 79.

²⁷ FERRUA 2001, 110, n° 82.

²⁸ FERRUA 2001, 170-171, n° 138.

²⁹ FERRUA 2001, 222, n° 189.

³⁰ CRIMI 2008.

Une stèle funéraire fragmentaire du mont Soratte présente un cas apparemment analogue à celui de l'inscription milanaise : hors du cadre épigraphique se trouve une *tabula* pour le jeu du moulin, avec six trous dus à une réutilisation en tant que matériau de construction, peut-être comme dalle de ventilation ou de fermeture d'une tombe. Il est possible que la *tabula* ait été gravée après l'inscription funéraire, à en juger par le fait qu'un côté est parallèle au bord extérieur du cadre de l'inscription et semble en tenir compte³¹.

En conclusion, nous soulignerons l'intérêt que cet exemplaire, daté *ad annum*, peut avoir dans le débat scientifique, tout en laissant aux experts des jeux anciens l'interprétation – réelle ou symbolique – de cette *tabula* qui était jusqu'ici passée inaperçue.

³¹ DI STEFANO MANZELLA 1992, 164.

Illustrations

Fig. 1-4. Milan, palais Brivio Sforza, déjà Trivulzio. L'inscription de *Agate* vue sous différents angles, derrière la balustrade de l'escalier conduisant du rez-de-chaussée au premier étage. Photo L. Caldera et L. Monopoli © Soprintendenza per i beni archeologici della Lombardia.

Fig. 5. Milan, vue aérienne du Duomo avec Via Pattari (la route légèrement incurvée, à droite) conduisant à la place Fontana (en bas à droite). Photo d'après Google Earth.

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**III.
BETWEEN
LITERARY
FICTION AND
DIVINATION**

Plato plays Polis

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Abstract. At *Republic* 422e1-423a2, while discussing Callipolis and its ability to wage war, Socrates makes a punning reference to the ancient boardgame *polis*. In this contest, two opponents deployed sets of identical *pestoi* (counters) to surround and capture the enemy's forces. Socrates' allusion is not simply amusing; it is well-suited to the dialogue's philosophical content and historical context. With regard to philosophy, Callipolis' guardians resemble the *pestoi*. Their training makes them equal and interchangeable, while their personal interests are subordinated to those of the group to discourage dissent (*stasis*) and promote unity. Elsewhere in the Platonic corpus, learning to play *polis* is mentioned as part of a philosophical education. In the hands of a skilled practitioner like Socrates, dialectic is like playing *polis*. With regard to history, the *Republic's* main interlocutors (Socrates, Adeimantus, Glaucon) were soldiers known for their bravery. Moreover, its readers remembered the rule of the Thirty Tyrants and its aftermath. Indeed, the dialogue's arguments about the just city and regime change are framed by an allusion to the movements of Thrasybulus and Critias and their respective troops around the game board of Attica. At Athens, *polis* was played for high stakes, namely the polis itself.

Plato, Socrates, *Republic*, *polis* game, counters

Περίληψη. Στην *Πολιτεία* 422e1-423a2, συζητώντας για την Καλλίπολη και την ικανότητά της να διεξάγει πολέμους, ο Σωκράτης κάνει μια λογοπαικτική αναφορά

στο αρχαίο επιτραπέζιο παιχνίδι πόλις. Σε αυτόν τον διαγωνισμό, δύο αντίπαλοι παρατάσσουν ομάδες πανομοιότυπων πεσσών για να περικυκλώσουν και να αιχμαλωτίσουν τις δυνάμεις του εχθρού. Ο υπαινιγμός του Σωκράτη δεν είναι απλώς διασκεδαστικός, αλλά εγγράφεται στο φιλοσοφικό περιεχόμενο και στο ιστορικό πλαίσιο του διαλόγου. Από φιλοσοφικής άποψης, οι φύλακες της Καλλίπολης μοιάζουν με τους πεσσούς. Η εκπαίδευσή τους τους καθιστά ίσους και αντικαταστάσιμους, ενώ τα προσωπικά τους συμφέροντα υποτάσσονται σε εκείνα της ομάδας προς αποθάρρυνση των διαφωνιών (στάσεις) και προώθηση της ενότητας. Σε άλλα σημεία στο πλατωνικό έργο, η εκμάθηση του παιχνιδιού πόλις αναφέρεται ως μέρος μιας φιλοσοφικής εκπαίδευσης. Στα χέρια ενός ανθρώπου που την ασκεί με επιδεξιότητα όπως ο Σωκράτης, η διαλεκτική είναι σαν να παίζεις πόλιν. Από ιστορική άποψη, οι κύριοι συνομιλητές της *Πολιτείας* (Σωκράτης, Αδείμαντος, Γλαύκων) ήταν στρατιώτες γνωστοί για την ανδρεία τους. Επιπλέον, οι αναγνώστες της θυμήθηκαν την κυριαρχία των Τριάντα Τυράννων και τις συνέπειές της. Πράγματι, τα επιχειρήματα του διαλόγου σχετικά με τη δίκαιη πόλη και την αλλαγή του καθεστώτος πλαισιώνονται από έναν υπαινιγμό για τα κινήματα του Θρασύβουλου και του Κριτία και των αντίστοιχων στρατευμάτων τους γύρω από την τράπεζα παιχνιδιού της Αττικής. Στην Αθήνα, η «πόλις» παίζονταν με υψηλό διακύβευμα, δηλαδή την ίδια την πόλη.

Πλάτων, Σωκράτης, Πολιτεία, το παιχνίδι πόλις, πεσσοί

Riassunto. In *Repubblica* 422e1-423a2, trattando di *Callipolis* e delle sue attitudini nell'arte della guerra, Socrate si riferisce con un gioco di parole all'antico gioco da tavolo definito *polis*. Schierando set di *peSSI* (pedine) identici, i due avversari si misurano nel gioco con l'intento di circondare e catturare le forze nemiche. L'allusione di Socrate non è semplicemente divertente, ma si adatta bene al contenuto filosofico ed al contesto storico del dialogo. Da un punto di vista filosofico, i guardiani di *Callipolis* assomigliano ai *peSSI*. La loro formazione li rende uguali e intercambiabili, mentre i loro interessi personali sono subordinati a quelli del gruppo per scoraggiare il dissenso (*stasis*) e promuovere l'unità. Altrove nel *corpus* platonico, l'apprendimento del gioco della *polis* è menzionato come parte integrante di un'educazione di indirizzo filosofico. Per un filosofo abile come Socrate, la dialettica è come giocare a *polis*. Sul piano storico, i principali protagonisti del dialogo (Socrate, *Adeimantus*, *Glaucon*) erano soldati noti per il loro coraggio. Inoltre, nei lettori era certamente vivo il ricordo del dominio dei Trenta Tiranni e delle sue conseguenze. Infatti, le argomentazioni contenute nel dialogo sulla città giusta e sul cambio di regime sono intrise di allusioni ai movimenti di *Thrasybulus* e *Critias* e delle loro rispettive truppe intorno al tavolo da gioco dell'Attica. Ad Atene, la partita di *polis* fu disputata per un'alta posta in palio, cioè la polis stessa.

Platone, Socrate, *La Repubblica*, il gioco della *polis*, pedine

Introduction

A significant portion of Plato's *Republic* is devoted to imagining a uniquely "beautiful city".¹ Early in Book 4, Socrates and Adeimantus discuss Callipolis' ability to wage war, with the former claiming pride of place for their creation. He then engages in an amusing bit of wordplay (422e1-423a2):

You are amazing, I said, in that you think that any other city than the sort we were constructing deserves to be called a city.

How so? said Adeimantus.

We should call the other cities something greater, I said. Because each of them is multiple cities, but not a *City*, as gameplayers say. For each city is in fact two which are at war with one another: the city of the poor and the city of the rich. And within each of these there are in turn many many more . . .

Ευδαίμων εἶ, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὅτι οἶε ἄξιον εἶναι ἄλλην τινὰ προσειπεῖν πόλιν ἢ τὴν τοιαύτην οἷαν ἡμεῖς κατεσκευάζομεν.

Ἀλλὰ τί μήν; ἔφη.

Μειζόνως, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, χρὴ προσαγορεύειν τὰς ἄλλας· ἐκάστη γὰρ αὐτῶν πόλεις εἰσὶ ἀμύπολλαι ἀλλ' οὐ πόλις, τὸ τῶν παιζόντων. δύο μὲν, κἂν ὅτιοῦν ἦ, πολεμία ἀλλήλαις, ἢ μὲν πενήτων, ἢ δὲ πλουσίων· τούτων δ' ἐν ἑκατέρῃ πάνυ πολλαί . . .²

Socrates' words οὐ πόλις, τὸ τῶν παιζόντων center around the infinitival construction πόλεις παίζειν. A scholium claims that the phrase referred to an ancient counter (*pessos*) game known as *polis*, and had become proverbial.³ According to Pollux, the game was played with two sets of counters on a board of spaces formed by lines.⁴ The number and arrangement of spaces and number of pieces per side remain unresolved; it is also uncertain

¹ I thank Véronique Dasen, Scott Garner, and Joe Jansen for their helpful comments on this piece; remaining errors are mine alone.

² The Greek text is that of SLINGS 2003; all translations are my own. On the wordplay see RIDGEWAY 1896, 288 and HANSEN 2002, 9-10.

³ GREENE 1938, 221: πόλεις παίζειν· εἰδός ἐστι πεπευτικῆς παιδιᾶς· μετῆκται δὲ καὶ εἰς παροιμίαν. The phrase τὸ τῶν παιζόντων recurs at *Rep.*, 573d1 and *Leg.*, 780c8, where it may simply refer to an (other) unstated proverb, and not the *polis* game in particular. See ADAM 1965, 211.

⁴ *Onom.*, 9.98. See the edition of Pollux's sections on play and games with testimonia and comparanda, COSTANZA 2019.

whether a die was involved. But the clear object was to keep one's own forces together, while surrounding and capturing those of the opponent.⁵ The wordplay at 422e shows that Plato and his contemporaries were certainly familiar with *polis*. But as usual, Socrates is using levity for serious ends: he is playing the long game. His amusing allusion is in fact admirably suited to both the philosophical content and historical context of the *Republic*.

1. *Polis* and *Polis*

The dialogue centers on the nature of justice, which it locates in tripartite civic and psychic orders. Under Callipolis' arrangements, each part of the broader whole knows its place in the scheme of things, and attends exclusively to its own affairs.⁶ Civic unity is a paramount concern, for *stasis* (dissension) inevitably introduces decline.⁷ Indeed, Books 8 and 9 of the *Republic* are devoted to tracing the typical ways regimes and individuals deteriorate over time. Socrates' remark (422e5) that cities other than Callipolis contain within themselves "multiple cities . . . hostile to one another" (πόλεις . . . πάμπολλαι . . . πολεμία ἀλλήλαις, 422e) thus alludes to the phenomenon of *stasis*, and as such, is no laughing matter: it portends trouble to come.⁸ But his comment also has a pointedly historical relevance for Athens. Scholars have often noted the symbolic equivalence between the boards on which *polis* and other games were played and the polis itself.⁹ The same analogy lies behind the *Republic* passage. Although it is difficult to pin down the dramatic date of the dialogue, the period 421-413 BC corresponds well with the most significant internal evidence.¹⁰ The date of composition is similarly hard to establish, not least because of the

⁵ On the imperfectly known rules of the game see LAMER 1927, 1973-1974; KURKE 1999, 260-261; HANSEN 2002, 12 and SCHÄDLER 2002, 94-98. On the difficulty of reconstructing ancient board games in general see SCHÄDLER 2019.

⁶ 433e10-434a1: "having and taking care of one's own, and of oneself, would be agreed to be justice" (ἡ τοῦ οἰκείου τε καὶ ἑαυτοῦ ἔξις τε καὶ πράξις δικαιοσύνη ἂν ὁμολογοῖτο).

⁷ At 520d4, Socrates describes the best city as "that least marked by *stasis*" (ἁστασιαστότατα).

⁸ Thuc. 3.69-85 provides a generalizing account of the bloody *stasis* that began at Corcyra in 427, emphasizing (3.82.1) that the broader phenomenon eventually overtook much of the Greek world. For a brief overview of scholarly approaches to the passage see HORNBLLOWER 1991, 466-467.

⁹ KURKE 1999, 270: "the board game is like a city; the city is like a game". DASEN 2015, 89: "le jeu s'inscrit dans l'ordre de la cité".

¹⁰ Relevant factors include: the first celebration of the festival to Bendis in Piraeus (327a2-4); the summer season in a time of apparent peace (350d2); Glaucon's *aristeia* in a recent battle in the Megarid (368a1-3); and the crucial fact that Polemarchus, Niceratus, and Socrates are all still alive. On the date of the Bendideia see WIJMA 2014, 139-142; on the battle see NAILS 2002, 155.

manner in which the *Republic* took shape. According to Nails, it was perhaps “stitched together from a separate Book 1, a proto-*Republic*, and new material, and revised late into an almost seamless whole”.¹¹ Holger Thesleff likewise claims that the work “took shape in different periods in Plato’s life . . . [and] was constantly present to [him] from the early 390s right down to the 350s when . . . it was finally ‘published’ as a complete whole”.¹² Socrates’ *polis* gambit thus plays out against the backdrop of Athenian history at the end of the 5th and beginning of the 4th century.

Plato skillfully exploits the gap between the *Republic*’s dramatic date and its date of composition. In particular, he employs biographical and historical information known to his readers, but not his characters, to create his own form of dramatic irony.¹³ Many of the most harrowing events from those intermediate years are linked to the Athenian civil war, in which several of Plato’s relatives played prominent roles, and about which the philosopher never ceased to think.¹⁴ In 403, Athens underwent its own *stasis*, split into multiple camps hostile to one another, and even formed two distinct cities: a richer, oligarchic one centered on the *asty*, and a poorer, democratic one based in Piraeus. The latter became home to Thrasybulus and his followers in a manner that expert *polis* players surely admired. First based at Phyle, a mountain fortress northwest of Athens, he gathered his forces,¹⁵ bided his time, and made a stealthy tactical retreat. Hastening by night along the cart road running just outside the Northern Long Wall, he snuck down to the Piraeus, and established a new camp atop the hill of Munichia. After this flight was discovered, Critias and his forces set out from the *asty* in hot pursuit. But they followed too closely. After entering the Piraeus circuit wall, they attempted to force their way from the Hippodamean agora up to Munichia. In the process, they were surrounded and ambushed: two of the Tyrants were slain, along with about seventy of their followers.¹⁶ The remainder of the Thirty withdrew to their own stronghold at Eleusis,

¹¹ THESLEFF 1989, 395.

¹² THESLEFF 1982, 101. See also THESLEFF 1989, 19–20.

¹³ According to GIFFORD (2001, 47) Plato thereby wants to “set directly and vividly before the minds of [his] readers the practical implications that certain ethical beliefs can and perhaps actually did have for the quality of a person’s life”.

¹⁴ *Seventh Letter*, 324c–326a.

¹⁵ On the process see TAYLOR 2002.

¹⁶ Xen., *Hell.*, 2.4.10–19. MUNN (2000, 239) hypothesizes that the oligarchic dead included Glaucon.

while an uneasy standoff took hold between the remaining oligarchs of the City and the democrats of the Piraeus.¹⁷ In 403 the two sides called it a draw, concluding a peace and an amnesty.¹⁸

Athens' civil war lurks just beneath the surface of the *Republic*. For one thing, the entire conversation reported by Socrates took place in the Piraeus, in the house of the metic Polemarchus. As Plato and his readers knew, both the host and one of his guests, Niceratus son of Nicias, subsequently became prominent victims of the Thirty. And in 399, Socrates was himself executed by the restored democracy. Plato clearly used this dramatic irony to remind the *Republic's* readers of something they knew firsthand: at Athens, *polis* was played for high stakes. The dialogue's topographical framing likewise drew attention to some of the initial moves in the civil war. Scholars have long explored the thematic importance of Socrates' introductory words "I went down to Piraeus" (κατέβην χθὲς εἰς Πειραιᾶ, 327a1). But what has hitherto gone unnoticed is that his route from the upper city to watch the festival of Bendis retraces the route of both Thrasybulus and his men, and of Critias and his.¹⁹ The *Republic* thus recapitulates the sequence of moves, combat, capture, and regime change at Athens.²⁰

2. Guardian Pessoi

Just prior to Socrates' *polis* play at 422e, he and Adeimantus had been discussing the role and training of the guardians who would rule Callipolis. According to Socrates, their main tasks were political and military. Having been created and armed, these rulers were (415d6-e3):

to go out and look where in the city they might best set up a camp, from which they could both restrain those within, if anyone refused to follow the laws, and ward off attackers from without, if someone approached their flock like a wolf.

¹⁷ MUNN (2000, 239-244) provides a brief summary.

¹⁸ WOLPERT (2002, 24-47) offers a detailed account of the process.

¹⁹ BAKEWELL 2020.

²⁰ HANSEN (2002, 13-14) notes that the *polis* game could be used to simulate both war between cities and war within them. DASEN (2015, 90-91, fig. 5) identifies a possible metaphorical depiction of polis on an attic krater from Vulci featuring two warriors playing on one side, and the attack on Troy on the other: "les joueurs, la ville à prendre et les adversaires en armes mettent en scène l'objectif du jeu, s'emparer d'une ville".

ἐλθόντες δὲ θεασάσθων τῆς πόλεως ὅπου κάλλιστον στρατοπεδεύ-
σασθαι, ὅθεν τοὺς τε ἔνδον μάλιστ' ἂν κατέχοιεν, εἴ τις μὴ ἐθέλοι τοῖς
νόμοις πείθεσθαι, τοὺς τε ἔξωθεν ἀπαμύνοιεν, εἰ πολέμιος ὥσπερ λύκος
ἐπὶ ποιμνὴν τις ἴοι.

In their twin tasks of keeping order within and enemies without, they were like *polis* players. Socrates' comparison of their external foes to wolves gives the resemblance more bite, for it implicitly lends the guardians a canine aspect. Importantly, Pollux notes that each of the counters in *polis* was colloquially known as a κύων ("dog").²¹ Elsewhere in the *Republic* the guardians are explicitly compared to κύνες.²² The two groups were alike in their spirited dispositions, the acuity of their sense perceptions, the importance of their bloodlines, and their need for appropriate training.²³ When it came to strategy and tactics, the guardians of Callipolis were dogged opponents.

So too were the characters discussing them. Socrates' main interlocutors, the brothers Adeimantus and Glaucon, were celebrated hoplites. At 368a1-4 Socrates teases them, claiming that:

Glaucon's lover began well his elegies for you both, o sons of that man, after you gained glory at the battle at Megara, calling you sons of Ariston, godlike kin of a famous man.

οὐ κακῶς εἰς ὑμᾶς, ὦ παῖδες ἐκείνου τοῦ ἀνδρός, τὴν ἀρχὴν τῶν ἐλεγείων ἐποίησεν ὁ Γλαύκωνος ἐραστής, εὐδοκμήσαντας περὶ τὴν Μεγαροῖ μάχην, εἰπὼν

Παῖδες Ἀρίστωνος, κλεινοῦ θεῖον γένος ἀνδρός.

Many details about this passage remain obscure, including the identity of Glaucon's lover, the particulars of the battle at Megara, and the ages of the two men when they served.²⁴ But as soldiers venturing forth from Attica, they had doubtless seen their fair share not only of combat, but of

²¹ *Onom.*, 9.98.

²² 375e1, 404a10, 416a4-6, 451d4, 459a2. They are also referred to with the synonym σκύλακες at 375a2 and 537a7.

²³ On Plato's use of the canine comparison generally see LONG 2015.

²⁴ NAILS 2002, 154-156.

polis matches as well. A century or more earlier, the period 540-480 BC saw the production of no fewer than 120 vases depicting the armed warriors Achilles and Ajax competing at board games.²⁵ Véronique Dasen attributes the motif's appeal in part to the way it allowed ordinary Athenians to participate in the glory of Iliadic heroes.²⁶ The 5th century subsequently saw tragedy explode in popularity: part of the genre's attraction lay in its ability to invest ancient myths with contemporary dimensions and detail. This was especially true with regard to military campaigns, on whose analogues many of the spectators had themselves fought.²⁷ In Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, performed in 405,²⁸ the chorus describes how the Achaean soldiers, stranded by contrary winds, dealt with the boredom attending camp life.

While walking along the beach, the women of Chalcis (192-198):

... saw the two Ajaxes sitting together,
the son of Oileos with the Telamonian
garland of Salamis,
along with Protesilaos
and Palamedes
upon their seats, delighting
in the intricate shapes of their *pessoi* . . .

κατεῖδον δὲ δὺ' Αἴαντε συνέδρω,
τὸν Οἰλέως Τελαμῶνός τε γόνον τὸν
Σαλαμῖνος στέφανον, Πρω-
τεσίλαόν τ' ἐπὶ θάκοις
πεσσῶν ἡδυμένους μορ-
φαῖσι πολυπλόκοις
Παλαμήδεά θ' . . .

This literary evidence is complemented archaeologically by painted depictions on vases, surviving game boards, and *pessoi*.²⁹ Board games

²⁵ LAMER 1927, 1992-1994; DASEN 2015 and 2019.

²⁶ DASEN 2015, 92. ROMERO MARISCAL (2011, 398) argues that the theme should "be interpreted in relation to both generic and specific epic traditions mainly those of the *Cypria* on the murder of Palamedes and Achilles' wrath". On the cleromantic interpretation of such vases see BUNDRICK 2017.

²⁷ BAKEWELL 2007.

²⁸ GÜNTHER 1988, 1.

²⁹ On the difficulty of identifying surviving *pessoi* see PAPADOPOULOS 2002.

were thus a ubiquitous feature of life in ancient Athens and beyond. And as hoplites, Adeimantus and Glaucon must have had practice conducting both themselves and their *pestoi* under arms. Furthermore, if the ancient biographical tradition is to be trusted, the same would have been true for their brother Plato.³⁰

Among the best and bravest of the Athenian hoplites was Socrates, as Plato repeatedly attests. In the *Symposium* (220d5-e2), Alcibiades states that during the winter of 430/29, both he and his armor were saved by Socrates during the retreat from Spartolus. The beginning of the *Charmides* (153a1-d1) reveals just how much anxiety that battle produced at Athens; upon his return, Socrates was mobbed by acquaintances eager to hear the latest from Potidaea.³¹ And in the eponymous dialogue, Laches praised Socrates' valor during another debacle, that of Delium in 424. According to the general (181a7-b4), "if others had only dared to be like [Socrates], the honor of our country would have been upheld, and the great defeat would never have occurred" (ἐν γὰρ τῇ ἀπὸ Δηλίου φυγῇ μετ' ἐμοῦ συνανεχώρει, καὶ γὼ σοι λέγω ὅτι εἰ οἱ ἄλλοι ἤθελον τοιοῦτοι εἶναι, ὀρθὴ ἂν ἡμῶν ἢ πόλις ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἂν ἔπεσε τότε τοιοῦτον πτόμα). As a soldier, Socrates excelled at keeping his cool in desperate, rear-guard actions. Transferred to the gameboard, this attribute would have made him a skilled player there as well. For as Austin notes, in *polis* a man who had become detached from his formation and thus "isolated brought danger to himself and his side".³² Socrates' *forte* was rallying around and rescuing just such men.

At *Republic*, 333e3-4, Socrates claims that "the one most skilled at striking in battle . . . is also the most skilled at defending himself" (ὁ πατάξει δεινότατος ἐν μάχῃ . . . οὗτος καὶ φυλάσσεται). It thus comes as no surprise that Socrates was also adept at the disguised offensive. According to Adeimantus, many of those who engaged Socrates in dialectic found themselves gradually confounded, losing ground question by question, until they were at last forced to surrender (487b5-c3):

When these little bits are added together at the end of the discussion, a great false step appears that is the opposite of what they said at the outset. Like the unskilled, who are trapped by clever *pestos* players in the end and cannot make

³⁰ According to Diogenes Laertius (3.8), Plato served on campaigns at Tanagra, Corinth, and Delium.

³¹ See MONOSON 2014, 142-143.

³² AUSTIN 1940, 264.

a move, they too are trapped in the end, and have nothing to say in this different kind of *pepos* game, which is played not with pieces, but with words.

ἄθροισθέντων τῶν σμικρῶν ἐπὶ τελευτῆς τῶν λόγων μέγα τὸ σφάλμα καὶ ἐναντίον τοῖς πρώτοις ἀναφαίνεσθαι, καὶ ὥσπερ ὑπὸ τῶν πεττεύειν δεινῶν, οἱ μὴ, τελευτῶντες ἀποκλείονται καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσιν ὅτι φέρωσιν, οὕτω καὶ σφεῖς τελευτῶντες ἀποκλείεσθαι καὶ οὐκ ἔχειν ὅτι λέγωσιν ὑπὸ πεττείας αὐτῆς τινὸς ἡτέρας, οὐκ ἐν ψήφοις ἀλλ' ἐν λόγοις.

Adeimantus attributes the frequent *aporia* of Socrates' interlocutors to the superior play of their opponent. And at 487d9, Socrates seems to accept the accuracy of this characterization.³³ To conduct philosophical inquiry via dialectic is to engage in the verbal equivalent of *polis*. One could also regard the extended conversation at Polemarchus' house the evening of the *Republic* through the same dialectical lens. On several occasions Socrates hints that Glaucon and Adeimantus are possible guardian material. And his successful deployment of them and their arguments allows him to establish and defend their splendid new city.³⁴

3. Winning Moves

The guardians of Callipolis resemble *peposi* in yet another significant way: their individual well-being is rigorously subordinated to the greater good of the group. At 419a2-5, Adeimantus notes with concern that the guardians' duties will keep them from pursuing their own inclinations and desires. He objects that although "the city really belongs to them, . . . they get no good from it" (. . . ὣν ἔστι μὲν ἡ πόλις τῇ ἀλθείᾳ, οἱ δὲ μηδὲν ἀπολαύουσιν ἀγαθὸν τῆς πόλεως). Socrates counters by reminding him of the overriding importance of their basic strategic aim (420b5-8): "in establishing our city, we are not looking to make any one group in it outstandingly happy, but to make the whole city so, as far as possible" (οὐ μὴν πρὸς τοῦτο βλέποντες τὴν πόλιν οἰκίζομεν, ὅπως ἐν τῇ ἡμῶν ἔθνος ἔσται διαφερόντως εὐδαιμον, ἀλλ' ὅπως ὅτι μάλιστα ὅλη ἡ πόλις). Put in *polis* terms, victory is what matters: all members benefit from being part of the

³³ "They appear to me to be telling the truth" (ἐμοιγε φαίνονται τᾶληθῆ λέγειν).

³⁴ See BLUNDELL 2002, 199-206.

winning side. And for their part, the fallen are honored as *daimones*, with monument and hero cult.³⁵

The education of the guardians is designed to help them embrace their identity as Callipolitan *pestoi*.³⁶ Their childhood is spent in physical training and musical education. In their youth and early adulthood, they study a number of subjects, most notably arithmetic (ἀριθμός, 522c6), calculation (λογισμός, 522c7), plane geometry (γεωμετρία, 526c9), solid geometry (528a9-b2), and astronomy (ἀστρονομία, 528d10). Their intellectual training culminates in the practice of dialectic. And Plato also thought that learning to play board games like *polis* was conducive to philosophical inquiry. At *Phaedrus* 274c8-d2, Socrates claims that these same subjects, namely arithmetic, calculation, geometry, and astronomy, had all been invented by the Egyptian god Theuth. But he also makes several additions to the list, attributing *pestoi* games (πεττεία), dice games (κυβεία), and the alphabet (γράμματα) to the deity as well. Something analogous happens at *Gorgias* 450d4-7, where Socrates lists the arts (τέχναι) that accomplish their aims through reason (λόγος). These are arithmetic (ἀριθμητική), logic (λογιστική), geometry (γεωμετρική), and *pestoi*-games (πεττευτική). According to Plato, learning to play *polis* helped one govern and lead the real thing.

As noted earlier, isolated individuals posed particular risks in both politics and gaming. Callipollis' practices and institutions were therefore designed to promote civic unity.³⁷ The last thing any city needed was for a person or group to stand apart from the rest of society, meddle in the affairs of others, and seek its own ends. The "Noble Lie" (414d1-e5) was thus one of the most prominent features of the "beautiful city". It held that despite the visible differences among Callipolitans, they were all earth-born siblings of the same great mother; their principal duty was thus to defend their homeland.³⁸

Another noteworthy aspect of Callipollis' guardians was their uniformity. Raised communally,³⁹ without individually identifiable mothers and fathers,⁴⁰ and subjected to the identical training regimen, they were

³⁵ 468e-469b4. See also 427b2-8.

³⁶ See HANSEN 2002, 14.

³⁷ DASEN (2019, 111) refers to "la dimension symbolique du plateau de jeu comme métaphore de la cohésion civique". On the social value of Palamedes' invention see also VESPA 2020.

³⁸ BAKEWELL 2018, 102-105.

³⁹ E.g., 460b6-c5.

⁴⁰ 461d1-e1.

remarkably homogeneous. Socrates repeatedly uses metal-working metaphors to describe their formation. At 413d9-e1, for instance, he speaks of the need to “place youths amid various fears, and then transfer them again into pleasures, testing them much more than gold in fire” (εις δείματ’ ἅτα κομιστέον καὶ εἰς ἡδονὰς αὖ μεταβλητέον, **βασανίζοντας** πολὺ μᾶλλον ἢ χρυσὸν ἐν πυρὶ). Several lines later (413e5-414a2) he reiterates that “the one who is continually tested in childhood, youth, and manhood, and who always comes out pure, is to be made ruler and guardian of the city” (καὶ τὸν αἰεὶ ἐν τε παισὶ καὶ νεανίσκοις καὶ ἐν ἀνδράσι **βασανιζόμενον** καὶ **ἀκήρατον** ἐκβαίνοντα καταστατέον ἄρχοντα τῆς πόλεως καὶ φύλακα). Here the two participles from the verb *βασανίζω* (413e1, 413e6) and the adjective *ἀκήρατον* (414a1) emphasize that the guardians are like metals: they are continuously being shaped, tested, and graded. In the scrutiny they undergo, they resemble precious metals, and the coins that were made from these.⁴¹ And the elders supervising the guardians were not unlike the public currency testers (*δοκιμασταί*) at Athens, who rejected improperly minted and substandard issues.⁴²

The *Republic’s* defense of justice, and of the guardians who administer Callipolis, culminates in the Myth of Er. According to this vision, the souls of the departed are shown a range of possible future lives available to them, make their selections, and are subsequently reborn.⁴³ In the *Laws*, Plato also refers to *metempsychosis*, characterizing it as the work of a board game player, a *πεττευτής*. According to the Athenian Stranger (903d3-e1):

since a soul, being assigned first to one body, and then another, and another, proceeds through all these changes on its own account or because of some other soul, no task remains for the *πεττευτής* except to move the character becoming better to a better space, and the one becoming worse, to a worse, each as appropriate, so that it may meet with the appropriate fate.

επει δὲ αἰεὶ ψυχὴ συντεταγμένη σώματι τοτὲ μὲν ἄλλω, τοτὲ δὲ ἄλλω, μεταβάλλει παντοίας μεταβολὰς δι’ ἑαυτὴν ἢ δι’ ἑτέραν ψυχὴν,

⁴¹ The same metallic metaphor is repeated at 502e3-503a7.

⁴² STROUD 1974, 165-166.

⁴³ 614d4-618b6.

οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἔργον τῷ πεπτευτῇ λείπεται πλὴν μετατιθέναι τὸ μὲν ἄμεινον γινόμενον ἥθος εἰς βελτίω τόπον, χεῖρον δὲ εἰς τὸν χεῖρονα, κατὰ τὸ πρόπερον αὐτῶν ἕκαστον, ἵνα τῆς προσηκούσης μοίρας λαγχάνῃ.

Put differently, the God is the ultimate *polis*-player, moving individual souls around on the cosmic board. And like all good players, he uses his pieces' capabilities to bring about the overall success of the world.⁴⁴

Endgame

In her analysis of board game play on Athenian vases, V. Dasen argues that the motif offered ordinary citizens a connection to the elite culture of the past.⁴⁵ On a broader level, board games thus constituted a link between traditional aristocratic notions of excellence that had prevailed at Athens under the Peisistratids, and the various ways they persisted, albeit in changed form, under the democracy.⁴⁶ At the start of the 4th century, Plato was attempting to navigate similar terrain. On the one hand, Callipolis was demonstrably undemocratic, and its guardians relentlessly elite. Indeed, Rose has characterized the *Republic* as an attempt to demonstrate “the continued validity of aristocratic *phusis*” and “to reestablish on a philosophically more respectable foundation the traditional grounds of heroism”.⁴⁷ But Plato was trying to do so in a democratic city that remembered full well the oligarchic bent of his family and friends, and their deadly consequences. Gabriel Danzig has carefully analyzed the apologetic nature of the *Charmides*, concluding that the young Plato would not have wanted to present himself as a faithful adherent of the Thirty, and he undoubtedly had some genuine reservations about their performance. But he would also not want to contribute to the continuing disparagement of ideas that he saw as essentially correct, or to unnecessarily disparage the authors and supporters of those ideas. Instead, he finds a middle way.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ See MACÉ 2020. On the history of boards used for cosmic play see SCHÄDLER 2000.

⁴⁵ DASEN 2015, 88: “Les peintres attiques ont construit une métaphore iconique qui concentre les valeurs de l'*aristeia* aristocratique au travers d'une pratique ludique qui sert d'opérateur symbolique”. She summarizes these values thus (95) “être le meilleur, selon une idéologie aristocratique fondée sur la stratégie et la performance agonistique”.

⁴⁶ The *polis*-player “learned what it meant to submit himself to the rules and symbolic order of the city that constituted him as a citizen equal in status to all other citizens” (KURKE 1999, 270).

⁴⁷ ROSE 1992, 353.

⁴⁸ DANZIG 2013, 518.

He suggests that the same holds true for Plato's later and greater work, the *Republic*. At one level, it thus represented the philosopher's ongoing effort to accept his place in the democratic scheme of things, to accommodate himself to his city. Translated into our terms, it showed a lifelong commitment to the sort of self-mastery shown by expert *polis* players and their *pestoi*.⁴⁹ But we should not forget Plato's Academy.⁵⁰ Located on the grounds of an ancient gymnasium outside the city wall, at a slight remove from the *demosion sema*, it likewise represented a mix of aristocratic and democratic traditions and practices. Moreover, it was the primary place where Plato read aloud to his students from his works.⁵¹ And we might therefore imagine that when his *kaloï kagathoi* pupils had had their fill of arithmetic and geometry, logic and dialectic, they too, like Achilles and Ajax long before them, relaxed with games of *polis* in the shade of the nearby trees.⁵²

⁴⁹ DASEN (2015, 88) notes that in vase paintings, players' immersion in their games "exprime la puissance de leur *métis*, alliant sens tactique et maîtrise de soi".

⁵⁰ CARUSO 2013 provides a comprehensive treatment of the site.

⁵¹ BALTES 1993, 17.

⁵² On the replanting of the site after the Persian sack in 480 see Plut., *Cim.*, 13.8. On the contiguities between boardgames, abaci, and mathematics see V. Dasen and J. Gavin in this volume.

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Rolling dice for divination, gambling and homeromanteia

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Abstract. Everyday tools such as dice and knucklebones are associated with gambling and divinatory books founded upon the use of Homeric epics. Papyrological documents about this practice date back to Roman Imperial times. Verses drawn from *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were currently assigned to a divinely inspired wisdom. The preface to *Homeromanteia* shows a link with religious and divinatory ideas current at that time (hilaristic invocations, hemeromancy, cledonism).

Homeromancy, lot-oracles, hemeromancy, gambling, alea, dice, knucklebones

Περίληψη. Χρηστικά αντικείμενα της καθημερινότητας όπως ζάρια και αστράγαλοι, σχετίζονται με τα τυχερά παιχνίδια καθώς και τα μαντικά βιβλία που βασίζονται στην χρήση των Ομηρικών επών. Παπυρολογικά τεκμήρια γι' αυτήν την πρακτική χρονολογούνται στους ρωμαϊκούς αυτοκρατορικούς χρόνους. Στίχοι ειλημμένοι από την *Ιλιάδα* και την *Οδύσσεια* αποδίδονταν εκείνη την εποχή σε κάποια θεόπνευστη σοφία. Το προοίμιο των Όμηρομαντεϊών φανερώνει πως οι τρέχουσες θρησκευτικές και μαγικές αντιλήψεις (ιλαστικές ευχές, ημερομαντεία, κληδονισμός) συνδέονταν μεταξύ τους.

Όμηρομαντεία, κληρομαντεία, ημερομαντεία, τυχερά παιχνίδια, κύβος, ζάρι, αστράγαλοι

Riassunto. Strumenti ludici correnti quali dadi e astragali sono associati non solo ai giochi di azzardo, ma anche ai prontuari divinatori fondati sulla consultazione dei poemi omerici attestati da testimonianze papirologiche di età imperiale. I versi dell'*Iliade* e dell'*Odissea* sono assegnati ad una sapienza veneranda di origine divina. La prefazione degli *Homeromanteia* mostra connessioni con la cultura religiosa e divinatoria contemporanea (invocazioni ilastiche, emeromanzia, cledonismo).

Omeromanzia, *sortes*, emeromanzia, *alea*, dadi, astragali

Ancient Greeks games had a deep religious meaning. This is especially true for games of chance.¹ The contiguity between the sphere of play and religion is materialised by the use of gaming devices to gamble or to draw lots. This paper examines a specific example of such contiguity: the *Homeromanteia* written in Roman Imperial times, in order to analyze dice oracles as a divinatory habit with a special relation to gambling.²

The practice of Homeromancy, or rhapsodomancy, was a technique of fortune-telling by using Greek hexametric verses as a reliable source of divination. Epics attributed to Homer were currently considered to be divinely inspired books written by a superhuman figure. Since Hellenistic times, Homer was reputed as a highly revered hero, and he was enshrined in many towns of the Greek-speaking world.³ In Late Antiquity, sacred texts have always been seen as direct means of communication with the supernatural order. Their ‘informative’ sense was increased by a ‘performative’ sense that had a numinous appeal.⁴ Christians notoriously used Bible quotations for divinatory purposes and Muslims as well through Qūran verses.⁵

The oracle drawn from Homeric verses belong in the category of *sortes* or lot-oracles. The making of everyday decisions was involved by casting lots. The most ancient systems of lots were meant as a series of ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers.⁶ Homeromanteia fits in a more complex frame, since an epic verse was randomly read in order to ensure a prophetic answer to the inquirer. All considered, this method was, however, quite easy to perform. It consisted of randomly finding a verse from a previously arranged list and then applying sentences from Homeric epics to the practitioner’s

¹ This research is part of the ERC Advanced project “Locus Ludi. The Cultural Fabric of Play and Games in Classical Antiquity” based at the University of Fribourg-CH. This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement # 741520). For board games with dice (*kybeia*) and pawns (*pesseia*) see SCHÄDLER 1999; SCHÄDLER 2013; PARASKEVAÏDIS 1990, 30-38; PARASKEVAÏDIS 1992, 24-29; LAZOS 2002, 368-382, 469-484; COSTANZA 2019a, 186-196; COSTANZA 2020b, 383-387.

² For lots which are closely associated with mercantile concerns see PURCELL 1995, 21 = PURCELL 2004, 193; see also VALBELLE – HUSSON 1998, 1065ff.; FRANKFURTER 2005, 246f.; MEERSON 2019, 138f.

³ See SCHWENDNER 2002, 108; COSTANZA 2009b, 124-125, 144.

⁴ See FRANKFURTER 2002, 169; FRANKFURTER 2005, 248.

⁵ See BJÖRCK 1939; CANART-PINTAUDI 1984; WIŚNIEWSKI 2016; see VAN DER HORST 2019: 165-170. Still useful FLÜGEL 1860 for Muslim lot-oracles. See also KLINGSHIRN 2002; KLINGSHIRN 2005.

⁶ See HEINEVETTER 1912; SCHWENDNER 2002, 109; GRAF 2005, 55-59; MEERSON 2019, 139, 141. For the variety of decisions taken by using lots see VAN DER HORST 1998, 143.

circumstances. If the inquirer was not able to master himself procedures required to duly perform dice oracles, he could have asked for assistance from the professionals. In oracular centres, priests were commonly charged to consult such lists of prognostics for visitors of sacred places.⁷ As Gregg Schwendner suggested on the grounds of the results of archaeological campaigns led by the University of Michigan in Karanis and Soknopaiou Nesos, bilingual Egyptian priests mastering Demotic as well as Greek were involved in Homeromancy.⁸ Bilingual practice is well-known in Late Antique divination, in particular number divination. We may recall a bilingual ostrakon from Medinet Madi (*OMM* 728) concerning isopsephy, that is, a technique of adding up numerical values to the letters of the Greek alphabet; in this ostrakon Demotic numeral signs are used instead of Greek letters.⁹

Divining by Homeric verses was also a current spell in Greek magical papyri. For example, a fourth-century compendium of divinatory recipes as *PGM VII* (= *P. Lond.* 121), 1-148 offers a full list of lucky and unlucky days and other divinatory recipes.¹⁰ In the *Homeromanticum corpus*, we cannot find exact correspondences between verses countermarked by the same numbers and prophecies assigned to them. Therefore, prognostics go back to different streams of textual tradition. Indeed, similarities are undeniable, as a preface preserved in the fullest form in an Oxyrhynchus fragment (*P. Oxy.* LVI 3831) published by Peter Parsons confirms.¹¹ The invocation to Apollo is also attested in *PGM VII* and it was probably counted in *P. Bon.* 3.¹²

Given the strong influence of Hellenic culture to Graeco-Egyptian milieu, many *Homeromanteia* are preserved in papyri of the 2nd and 3rd centuries. This evidences the high degree of literacy in Roman imperial times. In general, papyri offer selected verses from both epics;¹³ sometimes, verses are quoted only from the *Odyssey*.¹⁴

⁷ See KLINGSHIRN 2019, 72-73 for the list of lots-oracles practiced in a large number of oracles, as Iamblichus' *Hypomnesticon* mentions with respect to little pebbles and stones.

⁸ See SCHWENDNER 2002, 110.

⁹ See MENCHETTI – PINTAUDI 2008, 107, 111; LOUGOVAYA 2011, 203; COSTANZA 2020C, 197-201.

¹⁰ Among Homeromantic papyri, *PGM VII* preserves a relevant treatise: see MALTOMINI 1995.

¹¹ See PARSONS 1989.

¹² See MONTEVECCHI 1953.

¹³ *P. Bon.* I 3, 2nd-3rd c.: see BINGEN 1961, 219; MALTOMINI 1991, 239ff.

¹⁴ *P. Oxy.* IV 773, 2nd c.; *P. Brux. inv.* E 5938, edited again by LAMEERE 1960, 113-47, no. 7; see BINGEN 1961, 219. It presents seven fragments from four columns containing Hom., *Od.* 2.304-312, 339-57, 362-74, 386-410 and more neglected bribes.

The Homeromantic preface given in *P. Oxy.* LVI 3831 is worthy of further examination. It is matter of a detailed introduction. Instructions are given to the users. We may remark that these handbooks on Homeromancy were conceived for didactic purposes. They were compiled to be read by everyone who was interested in this subject. Didactic ends are usual in the realm of divination. Papyri about hieroscopy, that is divination by examining the entrails of sacrificial victims, also give full instruction about how to perform this technique.¹⁵ The preface to Homeromantic texts can be read in *P. Oxy.* LVI 3831, ll. 1-21:

πρῶτο(ν) μ(έν) εἰδέναι σε δεῖ τὰς ἡμέρας αἴς [
 χρῆσθαι τῷ μαντ(είω) β' εὐχόμε(εν)ο(ν) τ(ήν) ἐπωιδ[ήν
 εἰπεῖν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ εὐξασθαι ἐν σεαυτῷι πρ .[
 ἂ βούλει. Τρίτο(ν) λαβόντα τὸ(ν) κύβ(ον) ἀ(πο)ρίψαι τρ[ίς
 5 καὶ ἀ(πο)ρίψαντα πρ(ὸς) τὸ(ν) ἀριθμὸ(ν) τ(ῶν) τριῶν τ. [

Κλυθι, ἄναξ, ὅς που Λυκ(ίης) ἐν πίον(ι) δῆμωι / ε(ῖς) ἢ ἐ[ν]ι
 Τροί[η]τ' δύνασαι δὲ σὺ πάντοσ' ἀκούειν / ἀνέρι
 κηδομένωι, ὧ[ς ν]ῦν ἐμὲ κῆδος ἰκάνει
 10 καὶ μοι τοῦτ' ἀγόρευσον ἐτήτυμ(ον), ὄφρ' εὐ εἰδῶ
 ὅτ(τι) μάλιστα ἐθέλω καὶ μοι φίλο(ν) ἔπλετο θυμῶι·

αἴς δεῖ ἡμέραις α' ὄλ(ην) ἡμέραν β' μεσοῦσης
 γ' μὴ χρῶ δ' ἀπ' ἠοῦς ε' μὴ χρῶ ς ὄλ(ην)
 ζ' πρῶι καὶ δείλης η' μεσο(ύσης) θ' μὴ χρῶ
 15 ι' μὴ χρῶ ια' πρῶι ιβ' πρῶι ιγ' ὄλ(ην) ἡμέ(ραν)
 ιδ' ὄλ(ην) ιε' πρῶι ις' πρῶι καὶ δείλης
 ιζ' ἀπ' ἠοῦς ιη' μὴ χρῶ ιθ' ἀπ' ἠοῦς
 κ' πρῶι καὶ μεσοῦσης <κα' ...> κβ' ὀμ(οίως) κγ' πρῶι κδ' ἀπ' ἠοῦς
 κε' μὴ χρῶ κς' ὄλ(ην) ἡμέ(ραν) κζ' μεσοῦσης ἡμέρας
 20 κη' πρῶι καὶ δείλης κθ' μὴ χρῶ λ' ἀπ' ἠοῦς

Ὁμή(ρου) μαντ(εῖον) ἢ ἀκινάκης

¹⁵ See COSTANZA 2015, 175-181; COSTANZA 2016, 435-439; FURLEY – GYSEMBERGH 2015, 2-22.

ll. 6-11 = PGM VII (*P. Lond.* 121), ll. 1-5

Firstly, you should know at which days you may use this oracle. Secondly, you must pray and say this prayer for the god for whatever you want. Thirdly, once you have taken the die, you must throw it three times and throw it for the number of three ciphers.

«Answer me, Lord, who rule the fertile valley of Lycia, in which lay Troy. Thou might always listen to someone in trouble, such as a great trouble burdens me and tell me this promptly so that I know very well what I especially want to know and what is dear to my heart».

In the following days you must perform the oracle: the 1st day of the month all the day, the 2nd at noon, the 3rd not at all, the 4th from dawn, the 5th not at all, the 6th all the day, the 7th in the morning and in the evening, the 8th at noon, the 9th not at all, the 10th not at all, the 11th and 12th in the morning, the 13th and 14th all the day, the 15th in the morning, the 16th in the morning and in the evening, the 17th from dawn, the 18th not at all, the 19th from dawn, the 20th in the morning and at noon, <the 21st ...>, the 22nd the same, the 23rd in the morning, the 24th from dawn, the 25th not at all, the 26th all the day, the 27th at noon, the 28th in the morning and in the evening, the 29th not at all, the 30th from dawn.

Homeromanteion or “little sword”.

At the end (l. 21), this handbook is explicitly quoted as a *Homeromanteion* or *akinakes* (Greek ἀκινάκης from Old Persian **akinaka*^h). This term means a short Persian style sword, a kind of dagger worn at the belt, which was part of the standard equipment of Median and Parthian guards and then of Greek Hellenistic and Roman armies till Middle Byzantine period.¹⁶

The statement as oracle of Homer identifies the matter of this spell without any doubt, while the word *akinakes* borrowed from Persian expresses a metaphor relating to the agency of this procedure, its power and its keenness like a sword. Greek divination usually refers to exotic milieu and especially to the East, the homeland of all sort of magic practice and hidden lore in the eyes of ancient Greeks and Byzantines. In this respect, it is very significant to have divinatory recipes and lot-books ascribed to the Persian

¹⁶ Cf. D'AMATO 2012, 65.

Magician Astrampsychos (literally ‘Star Soul’)¹⁷ or *compendia* assigned to Persian wisdom.¹⁸

At ll. 1-5, it is preliminarily stated that inquirers should know favourable times, which are propitious to perform this oracle. This is a major rule in occult sciences. A full list of hemeromancy, the art of determining good and bad days, is given in *PGM VII*. At ll. 12-20, the author of the homeromantic preface summarizes lucky and unlucky days. Some days are wholly unfavourable. Other times, it is better to consult the oracle just in the morning or in the evening, or else only at noon. Just a few days are unfavourable with any restriction. Here, the author of this compendium amounts, as usually, the Egyptian month of 30 days based upon three decades.¹⁹

At ll. 4-5, the writer explicitly asserts that the inquirer should roll a six-sided cube three times, in order to find three ciphers countermarking the verse containing the prophetic answer to his question. In *PGM VII*, quoted verses are marked by a number of three ciphers written on the left. Homeric verses are arranged from α (= 1) to ζ (= 6), so that every possible combination performed by rolling dice three times ($6^3 = 216$ verses) was included.²⁰ Consulters acted by rolling dice three different times:²¹ they belonged to a wider audience than learned reading public and used Homeric verses as performative words.²² Subsequently, *Homeromanteia* fall under the remit of cybomancy, divination by dice.

Early epic tradition provides a tool of communication with the divine through playful objects of very common use, such as dice. Ancient sources commonly assign the invention of these tools to Palamedes, a culture hero reputed for his cleverness who changed the world through many useful discoveries. The dedication of Palamedes’ invention to the sanctuary of

¹⁷ See the oneiromantic recipe in *PGM VIII* and the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, cf. STEWART 1995; STEWART 2001, XI, XLII; NAETHER 2010, 87-88; LUIJENDIJK – KLINGSHIRN 2019, 28-31.

¹⁸ See the *Book of Wisdom, Palmomancy of Persians*, Βιβλος σοφίας. Περσῶν Παλμική, from Athen. Ms. EBE 1493, 13th c., edited by COSTANZA 2007, 606-617, cf. COSTANZA 2009a, 199-201; COSTANZA 2012, 777; VÍTEK 2006, 264. Persian science and pseudosciences was a pervasive phenomenon in Constantinople since 12th c., and still more in Palaiologan times: see MAGDALINO 2006, 104, 148; MAVROUDI 2006, 56, 66.

¹⁹ On hemerologia in *P. Oxy. LVI 3831* see NAETHER 2010, 87, 330; in the *Sortes Astrampsychi* see NAETHER 2010, 86.

²⁰ See instructions given in Introduction at *P. Oxy. LVI 3831*, ll. 1-6; see MALTOMINI 1995, 107.

²¹ *PGM VII* 1-152, 3rd c.; see HOPFNER 1924, 213; HOPFNER 1928b, 1286; MALTOMINI 1995, 107-22; SCHWENDNER 2002, 109.

²² See KARANIKA 2011, 255-256; ARCARI 2019, 68-69.

Tychê probably refers to an oracular function.²³ Other lot-oracles were based on rolling four-sided knucklebones (Greek ἀστράγαλοι, Latin *tali*) – or probably their imitations in bronze, wood, or ivory –²⁴ as lots, in order to forecast the future.²⁵ This is the case of an alphabet oracle from Adada in Pisidia (Asia Minor), where the user had to roll a knucklebone five times, in order to find the answer to his fate, that is, a verse inscribed next to the combination of values obtained by his throws.²⁶

At l. 2ff., the compiler directs the user to pray the god. At l. 6ff., the deity, whose favor should be invoked, is Apollo Lycian. This seems quite obvious because he is the patron of the region of Troy, where fatal events happened that inspired Homeric rhapsodies, since these epics are the source of present oracle.

Hilastic, that is propitiatory, prayers are a key topic of divinatory methods, such as palmomancy, the art of interpreting involuntary movements of the human body, such as quivers, tremors and spasms.²⁷ In palmomantic papyri, the inquirer was directed by regular prescriptions to ask some ‘pagan’ deity for its goodwill. As in this oracle, supplications were prescribed in order to call for the god’s help as well as to guarantee the fulfilling of prophecies.²⁸ Prayers to gods were currently associated to throws of cubic, six-sided dice: the rules were overlying dice-throws and prayers to gods seem to be different from those commonly used in astragalomantic texts.²⁹

PGM VII mentions a prayer to “Hermes, Bringer of gains to the Merchants” (*Hermês Kerdēmporos*). This confirms the close association between drawing *sortes* by rolling dice and the character of trade which

²³ See Paus., 2.20,3-4: πέραν δὲ τοῦ Νεμείου Διὸς Τύχης ἐστὶν ἐκ παλαιότητου ναὸς, εἰ δὴ Παλαμῆδης | κύβους εὐρῶν ἀνέθηκεν ἐς τοῦτον τὸν ναόν: MADDOLI – SALADINO 1982, 368; COSTANZA 2020a, 38-39.

²⁴ On the controversial use of astragali replicas see CARÈ 2019. For games of knucklebones see SCHÄDLER 1996; LAZOS 2002, 174-198; COSTANZA 2019a, 197-209; COSTANZA 2020b, 387-389.

²⁵ Knucklebones were also used as random generators in a well-spread method of divining the future and they commonly appear in funerary context: see PARASKEVAÏDIS 1989, 88-92; HÜBNER 1992, 48-51; GRAF 2005, 60; CARBONE 2005, 405; CARÈ 2006; CARÈ 2010; CARÈ 2012; CARÈ 2013; NOLLÉ 2007, 7-17; COSTANZA 2018, 67-78. On Palamedes’ inventions such as dice, pawns, weights and measures see GERA 2003, 112-181; DEBIASI 2004, 120; FAVREAU-LINDER 2015; COSTANZA 2020a, 37-44.

²⁶ See NOLLÉ 2007, 62 and 138; MEERSON 2019, 139.

²⁷ See COSTANZA 2009a, 6, 33-35; COSTANZA 2019b, 78-86.

²⁸ See COSTANZA 2019b, 91-92.

²⁹ On standards of associating deities to dice throws see GRAF 2005, 63-64.

was ordained by fate.³⁰ We cannot forget how individuals at risk in daily life very gladly attempt to tame the most unpredictable effects of fate by rolling dice or by some other divinatory habit. It is, obviously, question of relation of lot-oracles with mercantile concern and perils of financial loss. Moreover, the divine protector of merchants (and thieves) was no other than the younger brother of the main Lord of divination, Apollo. Notoriously, he received the mastership on minor typology of divining by lots from his elder brother. As a trickster, Hermes is the patron god of every form of divination countermarked by a decisive component in fate, *alea*, and gamble.³¹

Post-Byzantine evidence is also available on this subject. A treatise very similar to ancient practice, as we know by Graeco-Aegyptian papyri, is edited by Odysseas Lampsidis. In this case, the user is equally directed to roll three dice, but his enquiry is associated with Psalm verses, instead of Homeric verses,³² as it usually happens in this period. Otherwise, Psalms offered lot-oracles since Late Antiquity, as papyrological evidence clearly shows.³³ Moreover, this late handbook proves the long-dating attractiveness of rolling dice for divinatory purposes. Humans always want to foretell their fate. If such an easy chance was at hand, why not try by rolling dice?

³⁰ For links between lot-oracles and fate see PURCELL 1995, 21 = PURCELL 2004, 192; GRAF 2005, 65, 77, with mention of this prayer to “Hermes, Bringer of gains to the Merchants” (*Hermès Kerdémporos*).

³¹ GROTANELLI 2001, 129-137; GROTANELLI 2005, 129-142; BURKERT 2005, 37; NAETHER 2010, 330; JAILLARD 2012.

³² See LAMPSIDIS 1941, 187-94, with edition of a cybomantic book attested by a middle 18th century’s manuscript.

³³ As it is well-known for Psalm 90, a text of supplication, see LA’DA CSABA – PAPATHOMAS 2004; KRAUS 2005; KRAUS 2006; KRAUS 2007; KRAUS 2014. Generally, for magical use of Palms see VAN DER HORST 2019, 156-157.

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Board games in ancient fiction: Egypt, Iran, Greece

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Abstract. Board games are often used as a plot motif in modern genre fiction, especially in detective and adventure stories. In these types of narrative, a well-known pattern of storytelling or literary structure (e.g., the treasure hunt, the detection of serial crimes, the initiatory course, or the medieval tale collection) is reworked and adapted to the rules and phases of a board game such as chess, *jeu de l'oie*, or the tarot card pack. This literary practice is very ancient and may be traced back to a number of novelistic compositions of the ancient Near East, dating from the 1st millennium BC to late antiquity. In the Demotic Egyptian *Tale of Setne Khaemwaset*, from the Saite period, the protagonist Setne plays a board game (probably *senet*) with the mummy of a long dead and buried magician, in order to gain a powerful book of spells. The widespread Near-Eastern story-pattern of the magical competition is here superimposed on the procedure of a celebrated Egyptian game. In a late Hellenistic Greek novella inspired by the *Odyssey* (Apion of Alexandria, *FGrH* 616 F36) Penelope's suitors play an elaborate game of marbles (*petteia*) in order to determine which one of them will marry the queen. This is a playful rewriting of the famous bow contest of the Homeric epic. A Sasanian novelistic work, the *Wizārišn ī čatrang*, adapts the age-old legend of the riddle contest of kings; the riddles are replaced with board games (chess and backgammon), which the opponents invent and

propose to each other as difficult puzzles for solution. In all these texts the board game becomes a central symbol of the transformative and innovative power of literary narrative.

Games in literature; narrative; magical contest; riddle contest; wooing contest

Περίληψη. Τα επιτραπέζια παιχνίδια χρησιμοποιούνται συχνά ως μοτίβο της πλοκής στη σύγχρονη μυθοπλασία, ιδίως σε είδη όπως οι αστυνομικές και οι περιπετειώδεις ιστορίες. Σε αυτές τις μορφές αφήγησης κάποιο γνωστό αφηγηματικό σχήμα ή πρότυπο λογοτεχνικής δομής (π.χ. το κυνήγι του θησαυρού, η διαλεύκανση κατά συρροήν εγκλημάτων, η μυητική πορεία, η μεσαιωνική συλλογή ιστοριών) υφίσταται επανεπεξεργασία και προσαρμόζεται στους κανόνες και στα στάδια ορισμένου επιτραπέζιου παιχνιδιού, όπως το σκάκι, το παιχνίδι της χήνας ή η τράπουλα του ταρό. Αυτή η λογοτεχνική πρακτική είναι πολύ αρχαία. Μπορεί να ανιχνευθεί ήδη σε μυθιστορικές συνθέσεις της Εγγύς Ανατολής, από την πρώτη χιλιετία π.Χ. έως τη μεταγενέστερη αρχαιότητα. Στη δημοτική αιγυπτιακή *Μυθιστορία του Σέτνε Χαεμουάσετ*, από τη σάιτική περίοδο, ο πρωταγωνιστής Σέτνε παίζει επιτραπέζιο παιχνίδι (πιθανότατα *σενέτ*) με τη μούμια ενός από καιρό πεθαμένου και θαμμένου μάγου, με στόχο να κερδίσει ένα ισχυρό βιβλίο με ξόρκια. Εδώ το διαδεδομένο μεσανατολικό αφηγηματικό πρότυπο του αγώνα μαγείας προβάλλεται πάνω στη διαδικασία ενός περίφημου αιγυπτιακού παιχνιδιού. Σε μια ελληνική νουβέλα από την όψιμη ελληνιστική εποχή, εμπνευσμένη από την *Οδύσσεια* (Απίων ο Αλεξανδρεύς, *FGrH* 616 F36), οι μνηστήρες της Πηνελόπης παίζουν περίτεχνο παιχνίδι πεσσών για να καθορίσουν ποιος από όλους τους θα παντρευτεί τη βασίλισσα. Αυτή η διήγηση ξαναγράφει με παιγνιώδη τρόπο τον διάσημο αγώνα τοξοβολίας του ομηρικού έπους. Ένα σασανικό μυθιστορικό κείμενο, το *Wizārišn ī čatrang*, διασκευάζει τον παμπάλαιο θρύλο του διαγωνισμού γρίφων μεταξύ βασιλέων. Οι γρίφοι αντικαθίστανται από επιτραπέζια παιχνίδια (σκάκι και τάβλι), τα οποία οι αντίπαλοι εφευρίσκουν και προτείνουν ο ένας στον άλλον σαν δύσκολα προβλήματα προς επίλυση. Σε όλα αυτά τα κείμενα το επιτραπέζιο παιχνίδι γίνεται κεντρικό σύμβολο της μεταμορφωτικής και ανανεωτικής δύναμης που έχει η λογοτεχνική αφήγηση.

Παιχνίδια στη λογοτεχνία· αφήγηση· διαγωνισμός μαγείας· διαγωνισμός γρίφων· διαγωνισμός μνηστειάς

Riassunto. I giochi da tavolo vengono spesso utilizzati come elemento della trama nella letteratura di genere moderna, in particolare in racconti polizieschi e in storie di avventura. In questi tipi di racconto, uno schema narrativo ben noto o qualche struttura letteraria (per esempio, la caccia al tesoro, la rilevazione di crimini seriali, il corso iniziatico o la collezione di racconti medievale) vengono modificati ed adattati alle regole ed alle fasi di un certo gioco da tavolo, come gli scacchi, il gioco

dell'oca o il mazzo di carte dei tarocchi. Questa pratica letteraria è molto antica e può essere fatta risalire a un gruppo di composizioni novellistiche dell'antico Vicino Oriente, che datano dal primo millennio a.C. fino all'antichità tarda. Nella cosiddetta *Storia di Setne Khaemwaset*, un'opera in egiziano demotico del periodo della Dinastia Saitica, il protagonista Setne gioca (probabilmente a *senet*) contro la mummia di un mago da lungo tempo morto e sepolto, al fine di ottenere un libro di potenti incantesimi. Il diffuso schema vicino-orientale della competizione di magia viene qui sovrapposto alla procedura di un celebre gioco degli Egizi. In una novella greca dall'età tardo-ellenistica, che è stata ispirata dall'*Odissea* (Apione di Alessandria, *FGrH* 616 F36), i pretendenti di Penelope giocano una partita complicata di pedine (*petteia*) al fine di determinare chi di loro sposerà la regina. Questa storia è una riscrittura scherzosa della famosa gara di arco dell'epica omerica. Un'opera novellistica sassanide, il *Wizārišn ī čatrang*, rielabora la remota leggenda della gara di enigmi tra due re, sostituendo gli enigmi con giochi da tavolo (gli scacchi e il *backgammon*). Gli avversari inventano i giochi e li propongono l'uno all'altro come difficili rompicapi da risolvere. In tutti questi testi il gioco da tavolo diventa un simbolo centrale del potere trasformativo e innovativo della narrativa letteraria.

Giochi in letteratura; narrativa; gara di magia; gara di enigmi; gara di corteggiamento

1. Board games and literature: A long-lasting love affair

All the world's a board,
and all the men and women merely players;
they have their pawns and dice and make their moves,
and one man in his time plays many games.
We are such stuff as toys are made on,
and our little life is played out on a board.¹

If I paraphrase Shakespeare in this manner, it is not because I would turn the bard into an aficionado of board games. Rather, I wish to draw attention to the long-standing love-affair between table games and literature, an intense relationship of exchange and mutual fertilization, which has been pursued since very ancient times.

The playing of games has provided the subject-matter for memorable scenes in narrative and dramatic works, full of passion and suspense, emotion or terror. Who can forget the tender *partita* of chess played by the young enamoured couple, Ferdinand and Miranda, in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (5.1.172-175)? The graceful game functions as a visual analogue of the delicate play of love in which the two young persons are engaged.² A very different confrontation over the chessboard occurs in Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*, when the knight challenges the pale-faced Death to a chess match, so as to gain time and postpone his inevitable end.³ Of course, Death is always the winner; in I. Bergman's bleak existential worldview, life is an intricate game against an opponent who cannot be beaten. In modern novels, such as Stefan Zweig's *Schachnovelle* and Vladimir Nabokov's *The Luzhin Defence*, chess becomes the protagonist's central obsession, an addictive passion which sustains the hero in

¹ I combine and parody two famous passages by William Shakespeare: "All the world's a stage, / and all the men and women merely players: / They have their exits and their entrances; / and one man in his time plays many parts" (*As You Like It* 2.7.139-142); "We are such stuff / as dreams are made on, and our little life / is rounded with a sleep" (*The Tempest* 4.1.156-158).

² See SOLEM 1954, 15, 21; LOUGHREY – TAYLOR 1982; POOLE 2004, 216-218, 224-226; EQUESTRI 2014; BLOOM 2018, 152-155.

³ See HOLLAND 1959; SCOTT 1965, 266-267; STUBBS 1975, 66-68; BALDO 1987, 365-366, 379-381; TÖRNQVIST 1995, 95-104; KOSKINEN 2005; EFTHYMIADIS 2012, 169-171.



Fig. 1

times of ordeal but also consumes his mind and psyche and ultimately leads him to madness.⁴

Other kinds of play have also attracted literary attention. Rabelais piles up an interminable list of over two hundred games which young Gargantua enjoys, as he wastes his childhood in idle pleasure (*Gargantua* 22). In another hilarious episode of this ebullient novel (*Tiers Livre* 39-43) the insipid judge Bridoye judges legal cases by a throw of the dice and almost never fails to pronounce an equitable judgement.⁵ The main story arc of the *Mahābhārata*, the enormous Sanskrit epic, also begins with a fateful game of dice (2.43-67) which determines the destiny of the starring Pandava family, the plot of the epic poem, and ultimately the history of the world (Fig. 1).⁶ In Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata* the rash playboy Alfredo

⁴ On Zweig's novella see DAVIAU – DUNKLE 1973; DOUGLAS 1980; LANDTHALER – LISS 1996; OLTERMANN 2008; GIOVANNINI 2014. On Nabokov's novel see STRUVE 1967, 161-164; ROGERS 1983, 222-230; CHANCES 1987, 137-139; TOKER 1989, 67-87.

⁵ See PSICHARI 1908; PSICHARI 1909; PERRAT 1954; DERRETT 1963; SCREECH 1964; BAKHTIN 1984, 231-239; DUVAL 1997, 133-154.

⁶ See LÜDERS 1907, 7-10, 21-29, 57-60; VAN BUITENEN 1975, 27-30, 106-159; BIARDEAU 1978, 101-108; BROCKINGTON 1998, 16-17, 29-30, 53-54, 139, 187-189; MINKOWSKI 2001, 174-176; WOODS 2001, 31-35, 57; TIEKEN 2004, 5, 39-44; WILMOT 2006, 18, 24-28, 318-497.

Germont, embittered and frustrated in love, plays a frantic round of cards in a party and wins all the bets.⁷ Life-size playing cards hold sway in the wonderland explored by Lewis Carroll's Alice, a nightmarish country of chaotic and ruleless games.⁸

The creative interchange between literature and board games may also affect the very structure of the literary work and the organization of the narrative material. The game may be used as a basic narrative framework, a plot pattern or a structural device upon which the entire story rests and unfolds. This happens *par excellence* in modern genre fiction, especially in detective and adventure novels, in which the storyline may be constructed on the blueprint of a board game and its procedure. The successive stages of the game correspond to individual episodes and are joined together to form the plot thread. Thus, the very process of playing, the competition and the moves of the players are transposed to the level of fiction and transcribed in narrative terms. Literary works of this kind are essentially narrative developments ("narrativizations") of the board game.⁹ Usually the procedure of the game is superimposed on a well-known storytelling pattern or narrative structure, which is firmly established in the literary canon of the corresponding genre and serves as the driving force of the plotline in many other novels. This particular literary pattern is now adapted, so as to fit the rules and phases of the game. The plot device of the table game thus becomes a strategy for the renovation of the standard materials of the storytelling craft.

For example, in Jules Verne's *The Will of an Eccentric* (1899) an idiosyncratic millionaire devises a gigantesque version of the *jeu de l'oie*, in which the entire territory of the United States serves as the game-board and each one of the federal states corresponds to a square (Fig. 2). Seven players are chosen to participate in this vast contest. As stipulated by the millionaire's will, they travel from one American state to another, like pawns that move on the squares of the board. Their movements are dictated by the throw of the dice, which are cast at regular intervals by the executor of the will. The winner will be the person who will first reach the final, lucky square, represented by the state of Illinois. The prize is the sum total of the millionaire's

⁷ See DELLA SETA 1983, 132-143.

⁸ See EAGLETON 1972; BLAKE 1974, 104-131; BIVONA 1986; SUSINA 2010.

⁹ Cf. BOYER 1987 on the ludic structure of genre literature.



Fig. 2

property, sixty million dollars. The *jeu de l'oie* thus functions as the skeleton of the novel. The narrative is taken up by the adventures undergone by the players, as they travel through the country, and the intrigues woven among them, when their paths cross.¹⁰

A time-sanctioned pattern of adventure stories, the treasure hunt, underlies this plot. The characters of J. Verne's novel are pursuing a treasure, the millionaire's enormous inheritance. Like the heroes of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* or of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Gold-Bug* or of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, they try to reach a final destination which will allow them to obtain this great treasure, the end and prize of their long quest. However, unlike the personages of canonical treasure-hunt narratives, J. Verne's characters do not follow obscure clues in order to track down the location of the precious hoard on a map or in geographical space. Instead, they move according to the whims of fortune, as dictated by the throw of the dice. The treasure hunt has been amalgamated with the random mechanism of a game of chance.

In Arturo Pérez-Reverte's novel *The Flanders Panel* (1990) the infrastructure is provided by chess, combined this time with a different literary pattern. Julia, an art historian, is restoring a 15th-century Flemish painting which depicts a nobleman and a knight playing chess in a room.

¹⁰ See HARPOLD 2005, 26-27, 38; HUET 2013, 409-411.

A snapshot of the game is shown in the picture, with the white and the black pieces placed in various positions on the chessboard. Julia discovers a hidden inscription at the bottom of the canvas, written in Latin: *Quis necavit equitem?*, “Who killed the knight?” She realizes that she must play this particular *partita* of chess backwards and retrogressively reconstruct the previous moves of the players, so as to solve the mystery of a murder that took place centuries ago. As she attempts this task, a series of murders occur in Julia’s own milieu, in such a way as to correspond to the reconstructed moves of the chess game. Every time the black queen eliminates a white pawn, one of Julia’s acquaintances dies. It becomes evident that the black queen is the killer’s avatar, while the white pawns represent the corresponding victims. With the help of a local chess master, Julia has to play the *partita* all the way through to the beginning, in order to discover the killer’s identity.

Chess is thus interwoven with a favourite plot structure of mystery writing, the detection of serial murders. The successive phases of the chess game run parallel both to the killer’s scheme of serial crimes and to the gradual investigation of the case. All the characters involved in the mystery (the detective and her assistant, the murderer, the victims) are represented as pieces on the chessboard. The process of criminal detection merges with the anticipation of the opponent’s moves, and as the *partita* of chess unfolds backwards, the investigators approach step by step the discovery of the guilty party.¹¹ In this story the chess grandmaster must combine forces with the detective; Bobby Fischer must dress up like Hercule Poirot, or else the word “checkmate”, *māt* in Arabic and Persian, threatens to resume its literal, etymological meaning of “death”.

Another famous novel based on chess is Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), the second part of the fairytale saga of Alice’s adventures. Little Alice passes through a mirror in her country-house and enters into an alternative world peopled by live, human-sized chess pieces, together with a variety of other wondrous creatures. Alice discovers that the entire countryside of this strange land is divided into squares, like a gigantic chessboard (Fig. 3). If she manages to travel all the way to the eighth row, like a pawn in a regular chess game, she will be transformed

¹¹ See DE URIOSTE 1997; GARCÍA-CARO 2000, 166-170; DEVENY 2006, 269-271; WALSH 2007, 22, 27-28, 90-93.

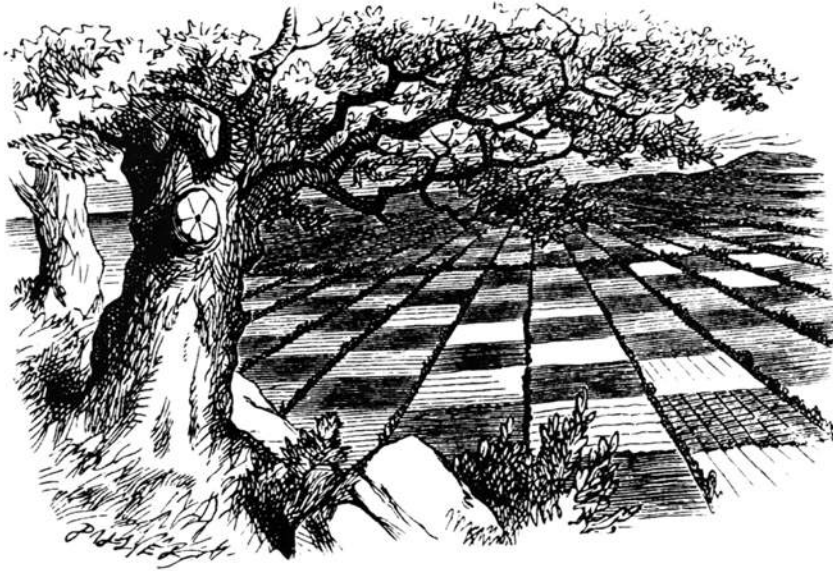


Fig. 3

into a queen. The main part of the narrative is taken up by Alice's journey across this enormous natural checkerboard. The young girl traverses the squares and passes from one row to the next; in the course of her journey, she encounters the quaint inhabitants of the country and learns their customs and ways of thinking. In the end Alice reaches the eighth row, is crowned queen, and attends an absurd party in her honour. As the party dissolves into utter confusion, Alice wakes up in her armchair and realizes that her adventure was a dream, not unlike life itself.¹²

In this novel the rules of chess are combined with a common narrative pattern of adventure and quest tales, the so-called "initiatory structure" (*structure initiatique*), a very old literary construct with deep roots in the popular imaginary and the folk tradition.¹³ The core of the initiatory structure consists in the hero's voyage into an alternative otherworld, which essentially represents a symbolic descent into the realm of the dead. The

¹² See TAYLOR 1952, 94-116; BLAKE 1974, 105, 132-148; LANGE 1993, 96-116; SUSINA 2010, 424-425; DRONG 2011.

¹³ The best examples of this form in modern literature are Jules Verne's novels of extraordinary travel and exploration. The same kind of structure has also been traced in Aristophanic comedies, ancient romances such as Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, the novels of Victor Hugo and Georges Sand, Mozart's *The Magic Flute* etc. See MERKELBACH 1962; TURCAN 1963; CELLIER 1964; VIENE 1972; VIENE 1973; THIERCY 1986, 305-327; GARNIER 2004; DÉOM 2005. On the initiatory theme of *Through the Looking-Glass* cf. HENKLE 1982, 95-99.

hero explores the otherworld and its wonders, faces monsters and threats, encounters figures of great wisdom, and learns important lessons and secrets. In the end the hero returns to the ordinary world and is virtually reborn to a new life. This is also Alice's experience in the novel, but her initiatory course takes the peculiar form of a chess manoeuvre. Alice's mystic journey through the wonderland is assimilated to the movement of a pawn over the full length of the chessboard and its final transformation into a queen on the eighth square. The structure of initiation blends with the most highly desirable scenario of a chess game.

Card-play has also been used as a surrogate literary structure. In Italo Calvino's *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* (1973) a group of travellers meet in an enchanted castle and discover that they have lost their ability to speak. They can only use a pack of tarot cards, provided by the lord of the castle, so as to narrate the stories of their lives to each other. Every character combines the tarot figures in order to produce a visual narrative of his adventures, which is described by the narrator and must be speculatively interpreted by the reader. The stories turn out to correspond to famous literary compositions or figures of mythology: the myths of Oedipus, Parsifal, and Faust, the dramas of Macbeth, Hamlet, and King Lear, and tales from Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and from the Marquis de Sade. In the second part of the novel the same experience of mute storytelling by means of tarot cards is repeated by the guests of a tavern.

Thus, I. Calvino refurbishes a well-loved medieval genre, the framed collection of stories, of the type of Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.¹⁴ Works of this kind consist of a string of autonomous but interconnected stories, told by a group of characters who are assembled in a communal transitory location, for example a castle, villa, or inn, usually in the course of a journey. In I. Calvino's collection the tales are placed in the same kind of conventional narrative framework; but the telling of the stories is filtered through the playing of tarot cards. The cards themselves become the basic elements of storytelling, the building blocks and the tools of the narrative. They take the characters' place, emblemize the scenery and the incidents, and are combined together to indicate the plotting. Images of the cards are printed in the margins of the pages,

¹⁴ Cf. MARKEY 1999, 22-23, 86-87, 106-107; DE TONI 2007, 173-184; CAVALLARO 2010, 90; BUSI 2012, 796-797.

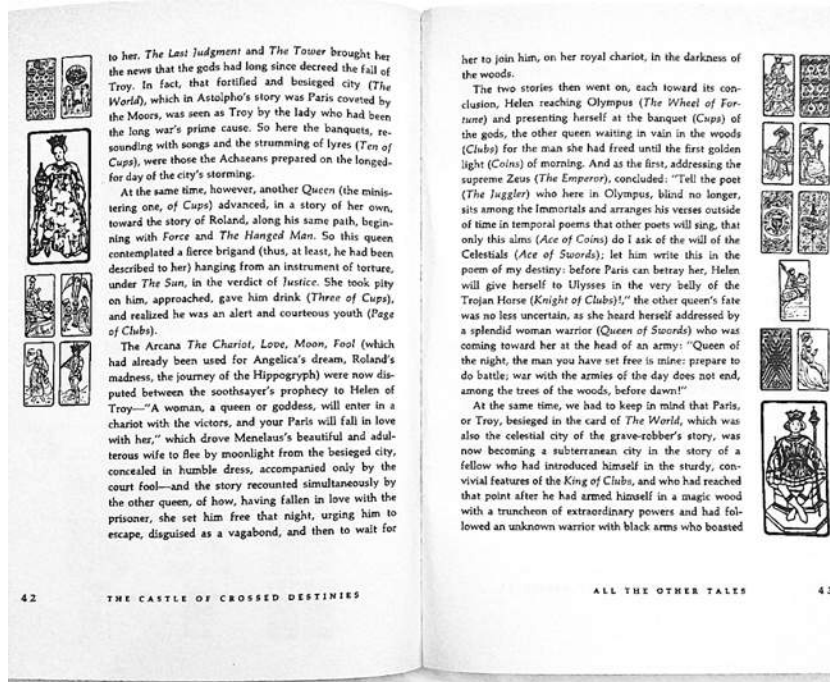


Fig. 4

in accordance with the corresponding segment of the narrative (Fig. 4). The pack of the tarot cards becomes a machine for constructing stories, a literary mechanism with infinite combinatory possibilities, and provides an alternative to language for the creation of narrative meaning.¹⁵ It is as though Chaucer had exchanged his writing desk for a casino table.

2. Board games in ancient fiction: From Egypt to Iran over a millennium

Evidently, the ludic structure of the literary narrative – that is, the merge of the process of a table game with a well-known plot pattern or generic technique – has been fruitfully exploited in various forms of writing in 19th and 20th-century literature. However, this kind of amalgamation and cross-fertilization is not a product of the modern age but can be traced back to ancient times. Its earliest specimens are found in

¹⁵ See CANNON 1979; CONTE 1994; CAVALLARO 2010, 90-125; BUSL 2012; and furthermore SCHNEIDER 1980; WOOD 1998, 162-167; MARKEY 1999, 98-107; RICCI 2001, 106-116; RENELLO 2005; PUGLIESE 2008.

a number of novelistic compositions from the ancient Greek and Near-Eastern world, which range in date from the 1st millennium BC to late antiquity.

2.1. Playing with the dead in the romance of Setne Khaemwaset

The first known example is offered by an ancient Egyptian prose narrative work, conventionally called by modern experts *The Tale of Setne Khaemwaset and the Mummies* (also cited, in abbreviated form, as *Setne I*). This is a kind of literary fairytale or imaginary romance which revolves around the adventures of legendary magicians. The text, written in Demotic Egyptian, is preserved on a papyrus of the Ptolemaic age, but the narrative probably goes back to the Saite period (7th and 6th centuries BC), if not to an even earlier time. The protagonist, Setne Khaemwaset, is based on a historical figure, the fourth son of Pharaoh Ramses II (ca. 1279-1213 BC), who was a high priest of Ptah at Memphis and a renowned excavator of old tombs and monuments. Soon after the historical Khaemwaset's death, legends about his hermetic preoccupations and his skills in wizardry started to develop. Gradually an entire cycle of adventurous romances was created, in which Khaemwaset was portrayed as a wizard and a necromancer, always in pursuit of occult gnosis. Many *Realien* of the setting and the storylines of these works point indeed to the historical and cultural conditions of the Saite dynasty.¹⁶

According to the story, the inquisitive Setne is searching for an age-old and powerful book of spells, which was compiled by Thoth himself, the god of scribes and sorcery. As it turns out, the book was acquired in old times by a master magician, prince Naneferkaptah, who literally sacrificed his life to obtain it and was buried with it in his tomb. Setne now breaks into the tomb and confronts Naneferkaptah's mummy, which rises from its bier and speaks like a living man. Here begins the capital episode of the narrative which is of interest to the present discussion.¹⁷ Naneferkaptah

¹⁶ On the cycle of romances about Setne Khaemwaset, its literary materials and chronology see GRIFFITH 1900, 13-66; PIEPER 1931; PIEPER 1935, 54-60; BRUNNER-TRAUT 1965, 296-301; LICHTHEIM 1980, 125-127; TAIT 1991; GRIMAL 1994; QUACK – RYHOLT 2000; HOFFMANN 2000, 207-213; SIMPSON 2003, 453-454, 470-471, 490-491; QUACK 2005, 30-42; VINSON 2009, 284-285; AGUT-LABORDÈRE – CHAUVEAU 2011, 17-20, 41-42; HOLM 2013, 98-104, 137-147, 157-158; HOFFMANN – QUACK 2018, 10-11, 126-164; VINSON 2018, 5, 22-40.

¹⁷ For text and translation of this episode see GRIFFITH 1900, 16, 30-32, 116-121; BRUNNER-TRAUT 1965, 171-175, 184-185, 298-299; LICHTHEIM 1980, 127, 132-133; LALOUETTE 1987, 190-191, 197-198;

challenges Setne to play a game against him; the winner of the game will take the book as a prize.

Oddly enough, the kind of the game is never expressly named in the Demotic text, but the occasional descriptive details given about it clearly indicate a board game. As soon as Setne accepts the challenge, it is said that the game-board (*hb^c[.t]*) and the playing pieces¹⁸ were brought before the two opponents. Later on, the board is called “game box” (*h.t n ir hb^c.t*); this presumably indicates an oblong, rectangular box-like container, which has a game-board with squares carved on its upper side and incorporates a drawer for storing the pawns in its interior; such contraptions are well known from ancient Egypt, and several nice specimens survive.¹⁹ Many scholars believe that Setne and Naneferkaptah are engaging in a contest of *senet*,²⁰ one of the most celebrated and popular board games throughout the long Egyptian history, from the Old Kingdom to the early Roman period (Fig. 5). Box-like boards and pawns in the form of hounds or dog-headed figures were common ingredients of the *senet*, at least during the New Kingdom, when the tale of Setne is set. Peter Piccione has offered the most cogent and methodical argumentation for this identification.²¹

It is of course possible that the game played in this narrative is not the *senet*. Perhaps it could be identified with another Egyptian game, such as the so-called “game of twenty squares”. It is also conceivable that the author of the tale did not have a specific kind of game in mind, and the description is only intended to indicate vaguely and generically a board

MASPERO 2002, 98-99, 109-110; SIMPSON 2003, 454, 462-463; BRESCIANI 2007, 882-883, 888-889; AGUT-LABORDÈRE – CHAUVEAU 2011, 20, 30-31; HOFFMANN – QUACK 2018, 146, 153-155; VINSON 2018, 7-8, 121-122. For further analysis, cf. PICCIONE 1994; TAIT 2007, 48-50; SERRANO DELGADO 2011, 96-104; LIOTSAKIS 2012, 150-156.

¹⁸ Literally the “dogs” (*iwiw.w*), a metonymical term that passed into general use because the pawns of various Egyptian board games were often shaped in the form of dogs or dog-headed figures. See PICCIONE 1994, 199; MASPERO 2002, 109-110; CRIST *et alii* 2016, 63, 66-69; VINSON 2018, 156.

¹⁹ See PICCIONE 1980; PICCIONE 1994, 200; DECKER – HERB 1994, 615-616, 663-679; PICCIONE 2007, 54-55; CRIST *et alii* 2016, 52-53.

²⁰ See e.g., PUSCH 1984, 852; MASPERO 2002, 109-110; TAIT 2007; SERRANO DELGADO 2011, 97-102; LIOTSAKIS 2012, 152-153; CRIST *et alii* 2016, 63, 66. Generally, on the *senet* game see NEEDLER 1953; PIANKOFF 1974, 117-120; PUSCH 1979; PUSCH 1984; PICCIONE 1980; DECKER 1987, 132-140; DECKER – HERB 1994, 611-616, 642-681; PICCIONE 1994; PICCIONE 2007; CRIST *et alii* 2016, 2-14, 41-80, 170-171.

²¹ PICCIONE 1994. Apart from the material apparatus of the game (box, dog-shaped pawns), Piccione also takes into account the peculiar religious and spiritual aspects of *senet*, which seem to reverberate in important plot elements of the tale. See more details below.



Fig. 5

game, without specialized identifying details. Even if one of these possibilities were true, the following analysis would not be essentially affected; regardless of the precise nature of the competitive play, the episode under examination is based in any case on the structure of a board game (even though a generic and nondescript one) and its successive phases, like all the works discussed in the present essay. However, if Setne and his opponent wage indeed a *partita* of *senet*, the plot of the episode gains in terms of narrative irony and artfulness. As will be expounded below, the particular procedure and movements of the *senet* game may be poignantly paralleled with certain aspects of the two opponents' confrontation or with the adventures and fate of the main hero.²²

To return to the storyline: as soon as the board and the pawns are brought before them, the two magicians start playing.²³ Naneferkaptah

²² The absence of the name of *senet* from the text may have a simple explanation: the nature of the board game, as described in the peculiar context of this narrative, would have been more or less evident to the readers, rendering the mention of its name superfluous. Alternatively, the author, who was composing a tale of suspense and mystery, may have wished to maintain an atmosphere of ambiguity and puzzlement with regard to various details of the action, so as to make readers wonder and rack their minds for explanations. Under this perspective, the purposeful anonymity of the game would induce readers to make guesses about its identity on the basis of the clues offered by the narrative. All this would enhance the suspense and enthrallment of the story.

²³ A tale of Herodotus (2.112) about Pharaoh Rhampsinitus presents the same essential story-pattern as Setne's adventure: the Pharaoh descends alive to the netherworld, plays a board game with "Demeter" (i.e., Isis), and returns carrying a golden kerchief as a prize. The two narratives may be connected and stem from related cycles of legends. See in detail SERRANO DELGADO 2011, 96-104; LIOTSAKIS 2012, 150-156.

wins the first round. Immediately he recites a spell, gives a blow to Setne's head with the box-like game-board, and Setne sinks into the ground up to his feet. Then the two men resume playing. Naneferkaptah also wins the second phase of the game and follows the same magical procedure, with the recitation of the spell and the blow on his adversary's head; now Setne sinks up to his penis. The same thing is repeated for a third time, and Setne sinks up to his ears. At this point Setne realizes that he is in serious danger. He summons his brother Inaros, who has accompanied him into the tomb, and asks for help. Inaros ascends quickly to the surface and brings back into the tomb the powerful amulets of the god Ptah, together with Setne's books of sorcery. As soon as these amulets are placed on Setne's body, the latter is released from the trap and springs upwards. Then, with readiness of mind, Setne grabs the book and runs out of the tomb, thus escaping the mummy's magical influence. This is not the end of the story, of course. The dead Naneferkaptah exercises his supernatural powers and conjures up a ghostly apparition to intimidate Setne. In the end, the hero is forced to return the accursed book to its owner's grave.

In this central episode of the narrative the confrontation of the two expert wizards takes the form of a board game, most probably a series of rounds of *senet*. However, another story-pattern lurks in the background: the contest of magic between sorcerers, a fairytale theme widespread in the entire Near East from very ancient times.²⁴ Already in a Sumerian epic poem of the late 3rd millennium BC, *Enmerkar and Ensuhrirana*, we read of a confrontation between a foreign wizard, who uses black magic to harm the Sumerian city of Unug, and a beneficent old witch who counters his spells and protects the city.²⁵ Afterwards the theme became common in the fictional literature of ancient Egypt, especially during the Late Period. In the known Egyptian tales of this type the contest also takes place between an evil foreign sorcerer and a wise Egyptian court priest. For example, another romance of the cycle of Setne contains two magical competitions, one of them artfully emboxed inside the other. The gifted child magician Si-Osire competes against a shaman who has come from Nubia to put Egypt to shame. Their contest turns out to be a sequel and a reflection of an earlier

²⁴ Cf. TAIT 2007, 50.

²⁵ See BERLIN 1979, 54-59, 88-89; VANSTIPHOUT 2003, 42-45; BLACK *et alii* 2004, 4-11; KONSTANTAKOS 2008, 74-77; WILCKE 2012, 26-27, 57-74, 80-86; KONSTANTAKOS 2016, 209-210.

magical duel, which had taken place many centuries before; on that occasion another enemy sorcerer from Nubia was matched by the wise Egyptian priest Horus of Paneshy, the Pharaoh's counsellor and protector.²⁶

Another Demotic tale describes a contest of wizardry between the legendary vizier Imhotep and an Assyrian witch. The contest is waged in connection with a military campaign of Pharaoh Djoser against the Assyrians and takes place on the battlefield, at the side of the battling armies.²⁷ The competition in miracles between Moses and the Pharaoh's magicians in the Biblical book of *Exodus* (7-9) is based on the same pattern and may have been influenced from tales of sorcery contests.²⁸ It is noteworthy that in all these narratives the competing magicians act as representatives of their kings or peoples and face the champion of an enemy kingdom. The *agon* of magic is the fictional equivalent of an interstate war. Behind the clash of spells, supernatural formulas, and magical feats we detect the political struggles between sovereign powers or enemy populations of the ancient Near East.²⁹

In the confrontation of Setne and Naneferkaptah this age-old popular story-pattern is merged with the playing of the board game. As emerges from the narrative, the rounds of the game are intrinsically connected with the implementation of magical spells. Whenever a round is completed, the winner has the opportunity to cast a damaging spell against his opponent. In the other stories of magical contests each one of the competitors employs spells to create magical entities (divine images, golems, monsters, wild animals, or destructive physical elements) in order to harm his enemy or neutralize the enemy's creations. In the duel of *Setne I*, on the other hand, the spells seem to grow out of the board game itself.

Although the narrational style at this point of the Demotic text is paratattic and somewhat brusque, the instant, almost "rapid-fire" succession

²⁶ See GRIFFITH 1900, 51-66, 162-207; BRUNNER-TRAUT 1965, 198-214, 301; LICHTHEIM 1980, 142-151; LALOUETTE 1987, 211-224; MASPERO 2002, 125-137; SIMPSON 2003, 476-489; BRESCIANI 2007, 901-908; AGUT-LABORDÈRE – CHAUVEAU 2011, 49-65; HOLM 2013, 141-144, 157-158; HOFFMANN – QUACK 2018, 132-145.

²⁷ See RYHOLT 2009; HOLM 2013, 164-166.

²⁸ See GUNKEL 1987, 111-121; NOEGEL 1996; RÖMER 2003; FELDT 2012, 20-42, 77-178; HOLM 2013, 119, 144, 378; KONSTANTAKOS 2016, 207-213.

²⁹ Cf. KONSTANTAKOS 2008, 126-141. The contest of wizards is also widespread in the folktale tradition worldwide. See e.g., COSQUIN 1922, 501-612; SCHERF 1995, 110-113, 748-751, 868-871, 1096-1098, 1436-1441; CLOUSTON 2002, 210-224, 255-257; KONSTANTAKOS 2016 with further references.

of the events should leave no doubt about their inherent connection to the readers' minds. Naneferkaptah wins a round of the game; immediately after his victory, he recites a magical spell against Setne; and immediately after the spell, he hits Setne's head with the game box, and the hero is immersed into the earth to a wondrously great depth, far more than he would have been normally expected to suffer because of a simple bump on his head. Clearly, it is not the mere force of the strike that sinks Setne so deeply into the ground. The blow with the game box is only a physical complement of the magical spell; a material object is actively manipulated in a certain way so as to channel the marvellous spiritual force onto the victim's person and produce the intended miraculous effect. It is the recited spell that releases the supernatural power required for the extraordinary immersion of Setne's body. In a way, the game box is used like the magic wand of medieval and modern western tales of fantasy, transmitting the power of the wizard's spell to the target.³⁰ And since Naneferkaptah implements his spell only after winning a round of the game, the very logic of the narration implies that his victory is a prerequisite for the use of this particular spell. Otherwise, the mummified sorcerer might well have employed his magical formulas from the beginning, as soon as he perceived Setne breaking into his tomb; he would have thus directly disposed of the intruder, and no game would have been necessary. If the board game is called for and played, it must have a function within Naneferkaptah's magical strategy of defence against his opponent. As suggested by the narrative sequence, the game serves exactly in order to empower the winner of every round to cast a countering spell against his adversary. The victory in each phase of the game generates a magical force, which is appropriately channelled by the winner, so as to strike and hurt the loser.³¹

At this juncture, the reader may appreciate the aptness of the *senet* game for this particular narrative context, its suitability for the mechanics and effects of the two wizards' magical confrontation. P. Piccione has emphasized the religious and eschatological aspects of *senet*, which tally

³⁰ A possible parallel may be found in the wizardry contest of the Sumerian epic *Enmerkar and Ensuhirana*: the two opponents magically create various animals by throwing a certain item into the river. According to one interpretation (BERLIN 1979, 54-57, 88-89), this item is a copper object with extraordinary powers which functions like a magic wand. On the use of wands in ancient Egyptian magical practice see RITNER 1993, 19, 227.

³¹ This was already understood by MASPERO 2002, 110.

with the mortuary setting of the episode. The *senet* was understood as a means of communication between the living and the dead: in Egyptian monuments and ritual texts a deceased person was often portrayed playing *senet* with a living one inside the tomb; thus, the game could be perceived as an attempt to establish a connection with the otherworld. This is also its function in the tale of Setne: the living hero is challenged to play and win the board game, which takes place once again inside a tomb and against a deceased man, in order to come to terms with the dead sorcerer and gain access to his possessions (the magical book). The playing of the *senet* was also regarded as symbolical of the passage of the soul through the netherworld, with the purpose of achieving spiritual renewal and a new life. This corresponds, in a sense, to Setne's experiences in the plot. The hero stakes his very existence in the game and hopes to acquire through it a divine book that contains the ultimate secrets of life,³² even though his quest is motivated by a selfish desire for personal gratification.

These parallels link the spiritual dimension of the *senet* to the scenery and the general outline of the episode. In addition, the playing procedure of *senet* in itself, the movements of the pieces and the course of the game, present characteristic analogies with the unfolding of the action in the course of Setne's tomb-raiding adventure. As the two wizards play against each other, the loser of the *partita* suffers magically on his own body the same fate that might befall an endangered pawn of the game. The *senet* draughtsman, while it was being moved on the board, faced a number of risks: it could land on a pitfall square and be detained there; or it might be overtaken and attacked by one of the opponent's pieces, and thus be obstructed, blocked, or removed from the board; or it might be relegated to a losing square and be eliminated.³³ Setne is also confronted with the equivalents of these eventualities in actual circumstances: he falls into

³² On all this see the detailed analysis of PICCIONE 1994. I cannot dwell more on his learned and valuable interpretation, because the focus of my discussion is different: rather than the mystical dimensions of the game, I am interested in the playing process itself as a narrative device for structuring the storyline and moving the plot forward. On these religious and spiritual sides of the *senet* cf. also NEEDLER 1953, 68-70; PIANKOFF 1974, 117-120; PICCIONE 1980; PUSCH 1984, 851-852; PICCIONE 2007; SERRANO DELGADO 2011, 98-102; LIOTSAKIS 2012, 152-153; CRIST *et alii* 2016, 2-3, 41, 47-58, 170-171.

³³ On the movements and risks of the draughtsmen in the *senet* game see NEEDLER 1953, 66-71; PIANKOFF 1974, 117-120; PICCIONE 1980, 56-58; PUSCH 1984, 852-855; DECKER 1987, 133, 137-138; PICCIONE 2007, 54-56; cf. CRIST *et alii* 2016, 54-56, 64-67, 98-99.

a pitfall, as his adversary makes him sink into the ground, and is blocked and immobilized like an obstructed pawn. He is also threatened with total removal from the world of the living, similarly to a piece that risks elimination. If Naneferkaptah had managed to play and win a fourth round of *senet*, Setne would have been entirely buried into the ground, under the tomb, and would have disappeared into the netherworld – like a pawn hidden away in the pitch-dark interior of the game box.

Thus, the entire story of Setne and Naneferkaptah is based on an amalgamation of the board game with the narrative theme of the magical contest. In this way, this latter theme assumes a new variant form. The broader political aspect of the contest, which standardly underlies all its other known fictional treatments (both in ancient Egypt and generally in the Near East), is lost in *Setne I*. Setne and Naneferkaptah are not the champions of rival kingdoms fighting for martial victory and sovereignty. Their competition in sorcery is not a supernatural version of war, civic rebellion, or political struggle. It is only a game of skill and cleverness, like the *senet*, played by two private contestants who are keen on personal gain. This aspect has reverberations on the general meaning of the story. Both Setne himself and his remote ancestor Naneferkaptah are flawed wizards. Magic is simply a game for them, a means for entertainment and acquisition of precious prizes, not a power for serving the realm, protecting their king and people, or promoting the common benefit. They handle their spells and sorcery tools with the nonchalance of the amateur players of a table game; and ultimately their irresponsible practice of magic leads both of them to personal suffering or doom.³⁴

2.2. The suitors' game in Apion of Alexandria

Similar amalgamation of ludic and narrative patterns also occurs in ancient Greek stories. A prominent example is provided by Apion, an Alexandrian grammarian and scholar active in the times of the emperors Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius. Among other works of antiquarian and philological character, Apion produced an interpretative dictionary of the Homeric poems under the title *Γλῶσσαι Ὀμηρικαί* (*Homeric Glosses*).³⁵

³⁴ Cf. LALOUETTE 1987, 204; PICCIONE 1994, 200; SIMPSON 2003, 453-454; HOLM 2013, 139-141; HOFFMANN – QUACK 2018, 146; VINSON 2018, 3, 198-203, 224-225, 271-272.

³⁵ Concerning Apion and his grammatical work on Homer see BAUMERT 1886; COHN 1894; LUDWICH 1917; LUDWICH 1918; NEITZEL 1977; HASLAM 1994, 1-3, 21-23, 26-29, 35-43; VAN DER

As the surviving fragments indicate, Apion explained many difficult words and idiomatic expressions of the epics and provided grammatical data, fanciful etymological hypotheses, and miscellaneous cultural, geographical, and natural-historical information in order to elucidate his lemmata.

Nevertheless, Apion did not limit himself to semantic and philological exegesis. In some cases, he seems to have included genuinely narrative portions in his explanatory comments, relating small tales on the adventures of Homer himself or of his heroes, which essentially belong to the type of novelistic fiction.³⁶ This is the case with the fragment *FGrH* 616 F36,³⁷ in which Apion comments on a well-known verse from the *Odyssey*.³⁸ According to the Homeric passage, the suitors of Penelope played a game of *pestoi* in the courtyard of Odysseus' palace, while they were feasting and enjoying themselves.³⁹ Apion provides a detailed description of the rules and the procedure of the suitors' game. If this digression was indeed included in the *Homeric Glosses*, it might have been forwarded as part of the elucidation of the word *pestoi*.⁴⁰

As Apion explains, the suitors numbered one hundred and eight. Their playing pieces, small tokens or marbles (ψῆφοι), were divided into two equal groups of fifty-four each and placed on opposing sides; a small void space was left in-between. In this middle space a single piece was positioned, which was called "Penelope". This was set up as the mark to

HORST 2002, 207-222; DILLERY 2003; DAMON 2008, 338-347; MATTHAIOS 2015, 221-223, 278; KEYSER 2015, 64-75.

³⁶ See e.g., *FGrH* 616 F34 (after Homer completed his two epics, he added at the beginning a codified indication of the number of their books); F35a (Homer was an astronomer); cf. F15 (Apion summoned Homer's ghost to interrogate him about his homeland and family). See COHN 1894; VAN DER HORST 2002, 209-210; DILLERY 2003, 386-387; KEYSER 2015, 51-52, 64-66, 79. In his historical work, the *Aegyptiaca*, Apion also related the famous folktale of "Androcles and the lion" (*FGrH* 616 F5) and other romantic legends and tales of magic (F6, F23, F28). See MARX 1889, 55-67; BRODEUR 1922; BRODEUR 1924; SCOBIE 1977, 18-23; KEYSER 2015, 13, 40-44, 51-52, 57-58, 60-61; HANSEN 2017, 189-191, 444. He clearly had a penchant for exciting fictional stories; cf. DICKIE 2001, 205-208; VAN DER HORST 2002, 209-214; DAMON 2008, 348-355; DAMON 2011, 134-145; KEYSER 2015, 79-80.

³⁷ From Ath., *Deipn.*, 16f-17b.

³⁸ *Od.*, 1.106-107.

³⁹ On this Homeric game cf. BECQ DE FOUQUIÈRES 1869, 308-309, 386-388; LASER 1987, 123-127; KURKE 1999, 253-255; CARBONE 2005, 161.

⁴⁰ The fragment has been plausibly allocated to the *Homeric Glosses* by JACOBY 1958, 141-142 and KEYSER 2015, 4, 64-67, 79. BAUMERT 1886, 6-7, 50 assigned it to a lost commentary (*hypomnemata*) on the Homeric poems; but it is doubtful whether Apion wrote such a commentary (COHN 1894, 2806; HASLAM 1994, 26).

be thrown at. The players cast lots to determine the order in which they would play. The first one took aim and tried to hit the “Penelope” piece with his marble. If he succeeded in pushing the “Penelope” forward, he moved his marble to the position occupied by the “Penelope” before the hit. Then the successful player would try to strike the “Penelope” again with his own piece from this second position. The purpose of the game was to hit the “Penelope” as many times as possible without touching the marble of any other player. The suitor who scored high points in this game had good hopes of marrying the real Penelope in the end. The game was therefore a test for determining which man would eventually wed the Ithacan queen.

Apion claimed to have heard all this information from a native of Ithaca called Cteson. No such person is attested anywhere else in ancient sources; apparently, Cteson is an invented character, a creation of Apion’s imagination.⁴¹ He was perhaps supposed to have been a descendant of Odysseus’ subjects or even a contemporary of the suitors themselves. The counterfeit attribution, an example of the classic literary technique of pseudepigraphy, clearly designates Apion’s account as fiction. The entire text is a short novella, a kind of paratextual narrative gloss on the *Odyssey*. A coup of fictional storytelling is here cast in the form of a philological and lexicographical note on a great poetic text. Apion’s narrative digression is a rudimentary forerunner of the postmodern literary artifices which would be later developed by authors such as Jorge Luis Borges, V. Nabokov, Milorad Pavić, and Tom Stoppard.

The core of Apion’s tale is an elaborate play with marbles, which requires skill and good marksmanship together with a modicum of luck. Significantly, all the elements of this game – the rules and procedure, the division of the game-board, the number and movements of the pieces – are unique and unparalleled in other ancient sources. Apion’s description does not accord with the types of the *petteia* game that are known from Classical authors.⁴² Presumably the form of the game has been invented *ad hoc* by Apion himself. The Alexandrian scholar borrowed the name of the *pestoi* from the *Odyssey* and attributed it to an imaginary game of his

⁴¹ Cf. DAMON 2008, 353-355; DAMON 2011, 139. BRODEUR 1922 similarly proposed that Apion invented the story of Androcles and the lion, which he presents as an event he has personally witnessed.

⁴² See BECQ DE FOUQUIÈRES 1869, 405-407; LAMER 1927, 1970; GUÉNIOT 2000, 38-39.

own creation. The suitors' playful amusement is as fictitious as the rest of the story – another indication of the novelistic nature of Apion's narrative.

As for the prize, it is nothing less than Penelope's hand – in other words, the suitors' main preoccupation and objective in the Homeric epic. The suitors' play is a competition for determining who will become the consort of the queen. The very process of the wooing is symbolically transferred on the game-board; a central pawn stands for Penelope herself, while her suitors are represented by the other tokens which try to strike and move the queen's piece (that is, metaphorically, to depose Penelope from her sovereign position and appropriate her royal power).⁴³ Thus, the suitors' game practically epitomizes and condenses the central theme of the second half of the *Odyssey*. The purpose of the game indicates the poetic prototype which underlies Apion's fictional conception. The playing of the *pestoi* is modelled after the famous contest of the bow, which Penelope proposes to her suitors as an ordeal for selecting her new husband.⁴⁴ As postulated by Penelope,⁴⁵ the man who will draw the string of the mighty bow with the greatest ease and will successfully shoot his arrow through the holes of twelve axes, will gain the queen's hand as a prize.

In Apion's story this archetypal mythical *agon* is playfully rewritten in terms of gamesmanship. Like the epic bow contest, the game of marbles serves as a test to choose the winning suitor. However, the difference between the two narratives is telling. The apparatus used in the original Homeric episode, Odysseus' valiant bow, is a lethal weapon. In the end of the contest Odysseus himself, who is present in the palace courtyard in disguise, will take the bow in hand and shoot the suitors to death. In Apion's playful fiction this instrument of heroic slaughter is replaced by the innocuous accessories of a diverting communal sport. Instead of bloody arrows which inflict mortal wounds, the suitors use quaint little marbles which are dexterously pushed around and thrown at a toy target. Athenaeus, who preserves Apion's passage, seems also to have perceived that the suitors' game is a kind of soft and effete equivalent or substitute of the traditional bow contest prescribed by the Odyssean epic myth. As Athenaeus

⁴³ Cf. PURCELL 1995, 7; KURKE 1999, 254-255; CARBONE 2005, 162-163.

⁴⁴ *Od.*, 21. Cf. KURKE 1999, 254-255.

⁴⁵ *Od.*, 21.74-77.

comments by way of conclusion, after citing Apion's text, "in this way the suitors, because of their luxury, have so flabby arms that they are not even able to stretch the bow".⁴⁶ A lifetime of gaming proves to be totally inadequate for the breeding of mythical heroes.

Thus, at the hands of the Hellenistic scholar-storyteller, the Archaic epic of honour and bravery becomes a courtly novella about dilettantish social amusements. Odysseus' original bow contest had turned the dining hall of the Ithacan megaron into a battlefield; by contrast, Apion's tale transforms it into a playground for bantering gallants. For the epic Odysseus love was a fight; for Apion's suitors it is just a game.⁴⁷

2.3. Chess and backgammon in an Iranian tale

A third example comes from the novelistic literature of Sasanian Iran. The short narrative pamphlet called *Wizārišn ī čatrang ud nihišn ī nēw-Ardaxšīr* ("The explanation of chess and the invention of backgammon", also known under the abbreviated title *Čatrang-nāmag*, "The book of chess") was composed in the Pahlavi language, probably around the 7th century AD.⁴⁸ The material of the narrative clearly goes back to the Sasanian period and may have been formed already during the reign of King Khusrau I (531-579 AD), in which the plot is set. The story depicts well the cultural and intellectual milieu of Khusrau's court, with its thriving scientific interests and philosophical speculations. Perhaps the tale circulated at that time in oral tradition as a court legend. A written version, a forerunner of the extant text, may also have been redacted in the Sasanian era and included in one of the great historical or didactic compilations which were produced during Khusrau's golden age.⁴⁹ Later the story was incorporated in the vast Persian heroic epic, the *Shāhnāme* by Firdausi, the paramount poetic treatment of Iranian myths and legends. Firdausi narrates the tale with greater literary skill and changes many circumstantial details, especially concerning the description of the games and

⁴⁶ Ath., *Deipn.*, 17b: οὔτω δὲ διὰ τὴν τροφὴν τὰς χεῖρας οἱ μνηστῆρες ἔχουσιν ἀπαλὰς ὡς μηδὲ τὸ τόξον ἐντεῖναι δύνασθαι.

⁴⁷ Cf. KURKE 1999, 254-255; CARBONE 2005, 161-163.

⁴⁸ On the dating of the extant text see NÖLDEKE 1892, 26; CHRISTENSEN 1930, 108-110; PAGLIARO 1951, 100; PANAINO 1999, 83-91; MARK 2007, 141-142.

⁴⁹ See BRUNNER 1978, 43; PANAINO 1999, 48-58, 86-91, 97-99, 119, 132-133; DARYAEE 2002, 283, 286-288; MARK 2007, 142-143; cf. CHRISTENSEN 1930, 100; PAGLIARO 1951, 98-100.

their parts and rules. Nevertheless, the main narrative pattern is retained in the *Shāhnāmeḥ*, basically unchanged.⁵⁰

This brief tale fictionalizes the invention of chess and backgammon in the context of an intellectual *agon* between two rival monarchs: the historical Persian king Khusrau I and Dēwišarm, a legendary ruler of India. Dēwišarm wishes to test the intelligence and wisdom of the Iranians. He therefore sends to Khusrau the board and pieces of chess, which has supposedly just been invented by the Indian sages, and proposes them as a puzzle for solution. The wise men of Iran are challenged to guess the rules and the rationale of this new game. If they succeed, Khusrau will receive lavish gifts and tribute from the Indians. Otherwise, the Persians will have to pay taxes to the Indian kingdom. No one of the Persian sages can solve the puzzle apart from Wuzurgmihr, Khusrau's clever minister. He easily explains the logic of chess and the symbolisms of the pawns before the Indian envoys, and then plays and wins three rounds against their leader. After this victory, it is Wuzurgmihr's turn to set a problem to the Indians. He designs another new game, the backgammon, and names it *nēw-Ardaxšīr* ("noble is Ardaxšīr"), in honour of the great founder of the Sasanian Empire. Khusrau equips Wuzurgmihr with a magnificent retinue, and the wise Persian minister travels to India and proposes his game to King Dēwišarm as a brain-teaser. For forty days the Indian sages try to understand the rationale of backgammon, but to no avail. Thus, Wuzurgmihr collects again much tribute from the Indian ruler and returns triumphant to Iran (Fig. 6).⁵¹

This storyline belongs to a well-known international tale type, the riddle contest of kings, which was widespread in the Near East from very ancient times and became especially common in court legends and wisdom literature. The standard pattern of the narrative type features two rival kings who engage in a form of spiritual competition instead of waging war against one another. Each one of the kings proposes difficult riddles or intellectual puzzles for solution to the other. The losing monarch is obliged

⁵⁰ See MOHL 1877, 306-319; PIZZI 1888, 222-237; WARNER – WARNER 1915, 380-394; DAVIS 2006, 698-704. Cf. NÖLDEKE 1892, 22-25; MURRAY 1913, 150, 155-157; PANAINO 1999, 86, 125-133; SCHÄDLER 2002, 99-102; KONSTANTAKOS 2008, 98-100; DARYAEE 2010, 11-16.

⁵¹ For translations, discussion, and commentary on this Sasanian work see PAGLIARO 1951; NYBERG 1964, xxi-xxii, 120-122, 206; BRUNNER 1978; DARYAEE 2002, 298-312; PANAINO 1999; DARYAEE 2010.

to become the winner's vassal and pay him tribute or cede portions of his territory, as though he had lost a war. In most of the stories the rulers are helped by their wise counsellors, who invent or solve the riddles on behalf of their kings. This tale type is first traced in a Sumerian epic of the late 3rd millennium BC and then in Egyptian legends and novelistic writings, from the 2nd millennium BC onwards. With the passage of time, it gained broader international diffusion over the entire Near East. It was incorporated in the enormously popular *Book of Ahiqar*, an Aramaic didactic romance which was translated in many languages; it was also taken over in ancient Jewish legends about the wise King Solomon and in Greek novellas of the Hellenistic and Imperial period. By the last centuries of antiquity, the riddle contest of kings had infiltrated into the legendarium of Iran and the novelistic traditions of India and the Arab world.⁵²

The same pattern provides the framework of the Persian tale of Wuzurgmihr.⁵³ In the legendary tradition of Iran Wuzurgmihr became the model of the sage, the prototype of the wise courtier and royal counselor, and many collections of sayings were attributed to him. Thus, he was included in several legends of wisdom contests, in which he played the role of the Persian king's adviser. In such stories Wuzurgmihr confronted the enemies of Iran (e.g., the envoys of the Indian ruler or of the Byzantine



Fig. 6

⁵² On the diffusion and varieties of this story-pattern see the detailed studies of KONSTANTAKOS 2004 and KONSTANTAKOS 2008, 65-183 with further bibliography. See also BENFEY 1892, 163-205; KRAPPE 1941; GOLDBERG 1993, 25-41, 157-172; KONSTANTAKOS 2019, 316-334.

⁵³ Cf. NÖLDEKE 1892, 25; MURRAY 1913, 153; CHRISTENSEN 1930, 102-104, 108-111; BRUNNER 1978, 44; PERRY 1986, 163-165; DE BLOIS 1990, 20; PANAINO 1999, 47-48, 98-99, 111, 119; KONSTANTAKOS 2008, 98-100.

emperor) in a spiritual competition, solved their difficult puzzles for the sake of his king, and demonstrated the intellectual superiority of the Persians. The narrative scheme of the riddle contest was thus transplanted and applied to the main figure of Middle Persian wisdom literature.⁵⁴

In the Sasanian tale the opponents do not exchange traditional riddles or kindred mental exercises, as happens in the canonical stories of this type. Instead, they propound to one another newly-devised board games, which are based on secret rules and have a sufficiently puzzling appearance. These games function as difficult enigmas for solution. Their complicated rules and procedures correspond to the linguistic intricacies and the tortuous imagery of the verbal conundrums, such as are usually set in the tales of riddle contests. The two games of the Iranian narrative are also equipped with a symbolic dimension, a second level of meaning. Their apparatus, pieces, movements, and manner of playing are said to refer to a specific order of things in the cosmos or in human experience; chess represents the armies and strategies of war, while backgammon embodies the entire structure of the heavenly and the earthly universe (see below on these symbolisms). In this respect, the two games resemble proper riddles; riddles similarly have a hidden “second sense”, in so far as their linguistic texture of metaphors and paradoxes alludes to a distinct reality.⁵⁵ In the Persian story the competitors are called to guess the secret symbolism of the games proposed, just like solvers of riddles, who must decipher the meaning cryptically conveyed by the obscure and enigmatic words and phrases of the riddling text. Once again, the board games are introduced into a preexistent narrative structure and contribute to the production of an innovative literary amalgam.

This time, however, unlike what happened in the Egyptian romance of Setne and in Apion’s novella, the games are not indicators of frivolity; they do not signal the characters’ irresponsible attitude or unheroic flippancy. In the Sasanian tale chess and backgammon operate as instruments in a novelized but grave interstate conflict, which will determine the fate and suzerainty of entire realms, exactly as happens in the canonical narratives about royal riddle contests. Furthermore, the games

⁵⁴ On the cycle of legends and wisdom compositions developed around Wuzurgmihr’s figure see CHRISTENSEN 1930; BRUNNER 1978, 46-48; GRIGNASCHI 1978; PERRY 1986, 163-165; MOTLAGH 1990; DE BLOIS 1990, 48-50, 53-57; MARCOTTE 1998; PANAINO 1999, 83-87, 105-123, 132-133.

⁵⁵ See KONSTANTAKOS 2019, 307-308 with many references and bibliography.

themselves are presented as serious and meaningful pursuits, which reflect important realities of the human world. Chess, as interpreted by Wuzurgmihr, is an allegory of war and symbolizes the clash of armies on the battlefield. Backgammon is given an even more sublime, cosmic significance and reflects the substance and structure of the universe. As Wuzurgmihr explains, the game-board is the image of the entire earth. The thirty counters, half of them black and half white, represent time, the alternation of luminous days and dark nights. The casting of the die stands for the revolution of the constellations and the firmament, which determines the operation of fate. As for the numbers on the die, they correspond to the numerical analogies inherent in the spiritual and material universe, from the one and only god to the six seasons of the year. The entire game is a parable for the creation of the cosmos by the divinity. Thus, the exegesis of the game becomes an epitome of Iranian cosmological and religious thought.⁵⁶

Formed at the twilight of the ancient world, this peculiar Iranian tale offers perhaps the most elevated and spiritual presentation of board games in ancient fiction.

Epilogue

Both the modern genre novels surveyed in section 1 and the ancient narrative works discussed in section 2 share a fundamental common characteristic. In all cases a board game provides the structural backbone for the development of the story and for the main dramatic conflict between the characters. The heroes confront each other over the game-board, pursue their plans through the rounds of their game, and express their passions and emotions by means of their moves. Above all, in every one of these tales the game functions as a literary catalyst which helps to recast old and traditional, perhaps even overused narrative models into a new creative form. In this respect, the fiction of game-playing becomes a symbol of the transformative and innovative power of literary narrative itself. After all, the writing of literature – is it not the most complex and elaborate game that can be played on a table?

⁵⁶ On these symbolisms and their function in the narrative see the analysis of PANAINO 1999, 48-58, 86-87, 159-161, 204-223; see also PAGLIARO 1940; PAGLIARO 1951, 98, 104-108; BRUNNER 1978, 45-48; PANAINO 1998, 20, 85-86; DARYAEE 2002, 287-295; MARK 2007, 143, 152; DARYAEE 2010, 9-11; O'SULLIVAN 2012, 202-204.

Illustrations

Fig. 1. The game of dice between Śakuni and Yudhiṣṭhira in the *Mahābhārata*. Snapshot from Peter Brook's stage adaptation of the *Mahābhārata* (1985).

Fig. 2. The life-sized *jeu de l'oie*, as played on the territory of the United States of America. Illustration by G. de Ribaucourt, from Jules Verne, *Le Testament d'un excéntrique*, Paris 1899, 160-161.

Fig. 3. The gigantic chessboard in the land through the looking-glass. Illustration by John Tenniel, from Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*, London 1871, 38.

Fig. 4. Page with text and images of tarot cards from Italo Calvino, *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*, trans. W. Weaver, London 1976, 42-43.

Fig. 5. A lion and a gazelle play *senet*. Scene from a painted Egyptian papyrus with images of animals comically engaging in human activities, ca. 1250-1150 BC. British Museum, 10016,1. Reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Fig. 6. The wise Wuzurgmihr and the sages of India play backgammon and chess. Miniature on paper, from an illustrated manuscript of the *Anthology of Persian Treatises*, Herat, Iran, Timurid period, 1427. Berenson Collection, I Tatti, Florence. Reproduced by permission of the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Photo Donato Pineider, Firenze.

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