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GAMES OF HISTORY

GAMES AND GAMING AS HISTORICAL SOURCES

APOSTOLOS SPANOS

ROUTLEDGE

Games of History

Games of History provides an understanding of how games as artefacts, textual and visual sources on games and gaming as a pastime or a "serious" activity can be used as sources for the study of history.

From the vast world of games, the book's focus is on board and card games, with reference to physical games, sports and digital games as well. Considering culture, society, politics and metaphysics, the author uses examples from various places around the world and from ancient times to the present, to demonstrate how games and gaming can offer the historian an alternative, often very valuable and sometimes unique path to the past. The book offers a thorough discussion of conceptual and material approaches to games as sources, while also providing the reader with a theoretical starting point for further study within specific thematic chapters. This book concludes with three case studies of different types of games and how they can be considered as historical sources: The gladiatorial games, chess and the digital game *Civilization*.

Offering an alternative approach to the study of history through its focus on games and gaming as historical sources, this is the ideal volume for students considering different types of sources and how they can be used for historical study, as well as students who study games as primary or secondary sources in their history projects.

Apostolos Spanos is a professor of history at the University of Agder, Norway. His interests lie in games and gaming as historical sources, rethinking the phenomenon of innovation in historical terms, historical dimensions of time, and the use of concepts in historical studies.

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Games of History

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Apostolos Spanos

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Dedication

To my children Alexandra and Fotios
for all the games we have played
and for those we haven't (yet)

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I dedicate the book to my beloved children Alexandra and Fotios with gratitude for all the precious moments we have shared in the demanding, sometimes chaotic, but always beautiful game we call life.

Kristiansand, November 2020

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PREGAME

The *Game of the Goose* is one of the oldest board games still played today. Since its invention it has been the prototype for numerous race games. It is a roll-and-move race game played on a spiral track of sixty-three spaces, including neutral spaces, goose spaces that advance and hazard spaces that punish the player. It is a European game originated in Italy and the oldest known reference to it is dated to the year 1480.[1]

The *Goose*, as the game is known, is a very good example of how an old and very simple game might function as a source and starting point for studying the past. Sometimes, a very simple question might open revealing windows to past cultures. In our case, the simple question is: Why sixty-three spaces?

Using philosophical, numerological and symbolic approaches, Adrian Seville claimed recently that the sixty-three spaces of the game are not related to life expectancy, as it had been believed by other students of the game, but to the medieval notion of the Grand Climacteric. In medieval Italy, where the game was invented, people believed that the sixty-third year of life was critical. Human life was supposed to consist of septenaries (cycles of seven years). This is why seven is important in *Goose*. But the ruling number in *Goose* is nine, which was supposed in medieval times to be holy, as "the trinity of trinities" (3×3). On the basis of these beliefs, the sixty-third year of life was perceived as the last year of the ninth cycle of seven years. As such, it was considered as fatal and dangerous; those who survived it could expect a peaceful and pleasant old age. The other central element of the game, the goose, also had a symbolic value in medieval times, as it was related to good fortune. Seville claims that the game symbolized spiritual advancement and reflects a culture, in which life was related to hazards and luck, and the notion of life was related to numerology and symbolism.[2]

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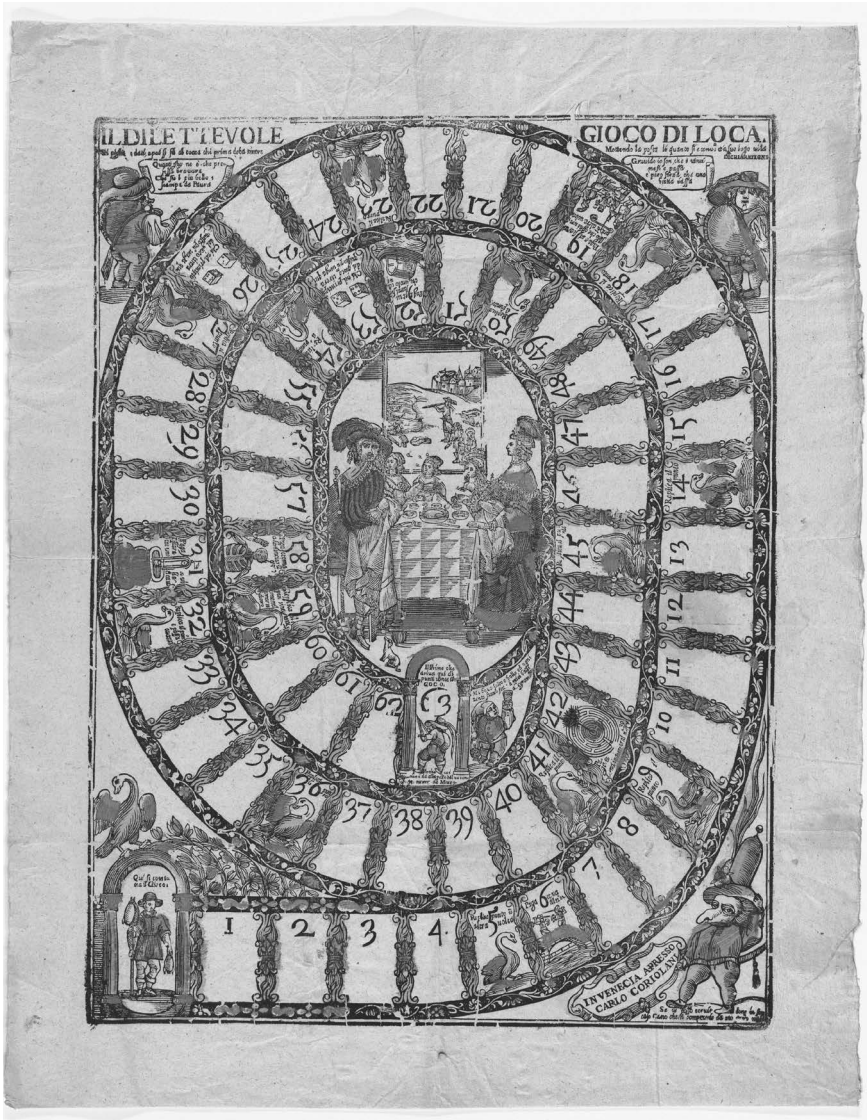

"The Pleasant Game of the Goose", woodcut with contemporary hand colouring, anonymous artist, published by Carlo Coriolani, Venice(?), after 1640. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Jefferson R. Burdick Collection (accession nr: 2016.215).

This is not a book on the history of games but a book on games as historical sources. All its chapters and subchapters present specific game examples, but the focus lies on the discussion of how the historian, or anyone interested in history in general, may use games as lenses to better understand the past. I would like to open the book by connecting the concept *game* to our very lives. Why is it so

that we tend to call a lot of our activities *games*? What do we try to achieve with that? What do we try to express? You may think of politics, economy, individual interactions, our sexual life and many other cultural and social areas that are being presented metaphorically as game fields. There are also those who liken even life or history to a game.[3] Indeed, life presents a lot of elements that are characteristics of games, as for example the need to follow rules which are either set up by an authority recognized by the "players" as relevant to do so, or simply agreed upon between the "players". Furthermore, you may think of the need to enjoy every minute of life, exactly as you enjoy every moment of a game. But it is not only life that presents striking similarities to games; the same does culture. This is probably the main reason why a number of researchers, from the middle of the twentieth century onwards, have claimed that culture is not only *expressed* in games and play, but it *emerges* from them.[4]

It is difficult to find a historical entity (be it a civilization, a culture, or a society) which does not include playing games in its main activities. We could say that we all need to play. But what we play, when, with whom, and according to which principles and sets of rules, all these are important elements of our culture, in many cases differentiating one historical entity from another. This is why games and gaming are important windows to the study of past historical entities. This claim is the fundament of this book.

For thousands of years, games have been one of the most popular forms of entertainment—and for some periods the most popular. Manuscripts, paintings and miniatures, engravings and mosaics, as well as many other witnesses place games and gaming at the core of everyday private and public entertainment. An equal number of witnesses demonstrate how in various periods games played a social role other than recreation, as for example in settling arguments, educating children and adults, or preparing them to deal with professional or military activities. We will study several of these cases, to examine how the study of games might help us better understand the historical entities (civilizations, cultures, societies, social groups and sometimes individuals) who played them.

But why could the study of games do so? The answer is related to the role played by games in both individual and collective life. First, we should keep in mind that, in the words of Colin Mackenzie and Irving Finkel, "games and their equipment are social and cultural phenomena" which "reflect (and influence) the values of societies".[5] An equally interesting thesis has been expressed by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman:

> As products of *human culture*, games fulfill a range of needs, desires, pleasures, and uses. As products of *design culture*, games reflect a host of technological, material, formal, and economic concerns.[6]

My approach to games is mainly cultural. It is based on previous scholarship, which has demonstrated that games have been, from time immemorial,

an important element of culture[7]. To quote the media scholar Paul Booth, "board games are an important artefact for reflecting on and analysing cultural trends, historical antecedents, and thematic content". He adds that board games "are meant to be played, but they also make statements about leisure, about socialization, and about mediation".[8] Booth speaks in this passage about board games and he refers to the contemporary society, but his claim could be generalized to refer to any kind of games and any historical entity.

Exactly because of their powerful role as exciting activities and cognitive and emotional experiences, games are themselves first-hand witnesses of social and cultural development. This is exactly what this book focuses on: The study of games (mainly board and card games) and gaming as historical sources.

We should not forget that games can be, and have been, studied in many different ways. Let us for example consider how E.M. Avedon and B. Sutton-Smith treated the subject in their seminal work *The Study of Games*, which remains influential almost five decades after its first appearance:

> Games are being dealt with as authentic cultural phenomena, in other cases games are used as representations of distinct social and psychological behaviors, and finally in some cases games are conceptual models for thinking about human behavior.[9]

Various scientific fields have paid attention to games as significant sources. Ludologists, sociologists, anthropologists, culture scholars, even psychiatrists have used games to analyse various aspects of human life, activity and interaction. It should be noticed though that the academic field of game studies has traditionally been served by scholars who are experts in other fields.[10] During the last decades, the situation has been changing. Game studies, which may be defined as a multidisciplinary field studying games and related phenomena[11], moves towards its self-sufficiency.

History, in its overestimated focus on politics and economy, turned for a long period a blind eye to games. To be sure, various historians, mainly cultural historians, have studied the history of specific games, as for example chess, or game types, as for example board or card games. But, to the limit of my knowledge, there is not much done in games and gaming as lenses, through which we can have a better view of the past. Roger Caillois, one of the most prominent figures in the social and cultural study of games, criticizes historians and sociologists for neglecting games as sources.[12] The relationship between historians and games has not improved much since.

This was indeed the picture before the development of cultural game studies. The field was *de facto* established in 1949, when Johan Huizinga published his seminal work *Homo Ludens*, which was to change the way in which games were studied[13]. To avoid misunderstandings: Huizinga's work focuses on play, not games. But it influenced equally the study of play and the study

of games from various perspectives. In the words of a modern scholar, Betsy McCormick:

> In the twentieth century, the major fields to pursue investigations of play and games include sociology, anthropology, psychology, and philosophy, but they all draw ultimately from Huizinga[14].

From being recreative occupations, play and games have since Huizinga been understood as central in cultural expression and development. Huizinga's main claim was radical: he claimed that the very phenomenon of culture arises, or emerges, from play[15]. Since Huizinga, a kind of a *cultural turn* in the study of games appeared, changing not only the focus on specific games, but also the theories and methods used by game students to illuminate the fascinating world of games. Some of these theories will be presented in the following chapters.

The field of cultural game studies has grown to include scientific areas that were not traditionally related to neither the study of pastimes nor to the use of games for serious purposes. To quote McCormick again, "cultural game studies have developed into an ever-expanding interdisciplinary exploration of games".[16]

At this point, it is important to make a clarification that will help you avoid misunderstandings in reading this book. Namely, I would like to draw your attention to the significant distinction between the literal and the metaphorical use of the terms *play* and *game*. As mentioned above, in everyday parlance, we call metaphorically *games* several activities that lie in the grey zone between what is at any time accepted and what is not.[17] The metaphorical use of the term *game* is *not* a part of my study. This book focuses on what we speak of as games literally, what we might call *actual games* or *games proper*, independently of whether these games were played for fun or to serve serious purposes[18]—you should keep in mind that from a historical perspective, most games, board and card games in particular, were played mainly, if not only, by adults.

Defining games and gaming

Studying games is one thing, *conceptualizing* them another. One of the problems related to the latter is, as Jaako Stenros writes, that "games have been conceptualized in varying research traditions—and the purposes of games, often implicit, are diverse".[19] How to approach games from a conceptual perspective is something we will discuss in the next chapter. The following pages aim at setting the background for a common understanding of the most central concepts in any game study, namely the concepts *game* and *gaming*. But first, I will say a few words on the relationship between *play* and *game*.

The definition of concepts used so broadly as *play* and *game* may prove much more complex and difficult than expected. As both are terms we all use in our everyday language, and since it is easy to identify an activity as a game (or at

least we think so), one can easily make the mistake of believing that *play* and *game* are terms and concepts the content of which is simple and clear. But this is not correct.

One of the main questions in game studies is whether it is legitimate at all to define *game* and *play*. There are many scholars, probably the majority, claiming that it is not. Irving Finkel for example writes that "scholars have been wrestling with the definition of 'game' and 'games' for years, and in some ways the wrestling doesn't really help".[20] Serina Patterson has also noted that "constituting a wide range of activities, games are easy to identify but difficult to define concretely".[21]

Various arguments have been used against defining *games*. The most celebrated comes from the field of philosophy. In fact, every game student is introduced to the philosophical approach of the Austrian-British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein to the concept of games. Wittgenstein, in his *Philosophical investigations*, uses games as the best example of a concept we cannot define in an intrinsic way. He claims that we simply cannot define games. His proposal is to identify games, and all other concepts sharing the same attributes, through a network of common similarities, which he calls *family resemblances*. He writes:

> 66. Consider for example the proceedings that we call "games". I mean board-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all?—Don't say: "There *must* be something common, or they would not be called "games"—but *look* and *see* whether there is anything common on all.—For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don't think, but look!—Look for example at board-games, with their multifarious relationships. Now pass to card-games; here you find many correspondences with the first group, but many common features drop out, and others appear. When we pass next to ball-games, much that is common is retained, but much is lost.—Are they all "amusing"? Compare chess with noughts and crosses. Or is there always winning and losing, or competition between players? Think of patience. In ball games there is winning and losing; but when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again, this feature has disappeared. Look at the parts played by skill and luck; and at the difference between skill in chess and skill in tennis. Think now of games like ring-a-ring-a-roses; here is the element of amusement, but how many other characteristic features have disappeared! And we can go through the many, many other groups of games in the same way; can see how similarities crop up and disappear.
>
> And the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities in detail.
>
> 67. I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than "family resemblances"; for the various resemblances between

> members of a family: build, features, color of eyes, gait, temperament, etc., etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way.—And I shall say: "games" form a family.[22]

There are, though, scholars, including Wittgenstein, who believe that there is a considerable number of common elements that allow us to get closer to the core of what a game is.[23]

One of the central problems a historian meets entering the world of concepts is related to our definition mentality and method. We tend to define concepts is a dictionary way, in other words by trying to include as many defining elements of them in one, and only one, sentence. This way of defining is probably enough when we define objects; but is it enough when we define concepts? I strongly believe that concepts, particularly those referring to multidimensional cultural activities, cannot be defined in a simple way. This is also the case with the concept *game*.

As a result, the concept *game* suffers from the same disease as a number of other cultural, social and political concepts: there are so many different definitions of it, that it is legitimized to believe that the concept is in fact not defined. It is probably not an exaggeration to say that each scientific environment has produced its own definition, while there are also cases of varying definitions within the same environment. I hope that what follows will make the field a bit clearer.

I would like to start with a few words on the difference between *play* and *game*. Most of us regard *play* and *game*, or *playing* and *gaming*, as synonyms, or at least as very similar activities or systems. But a closer study of these concepts reveals "important ontological as well as epistemological differences".[24] Distinguishing between *game* and *play* in general or between games and other forms of play is of high significance for the study of games.

A first problem the game student faces is linguistic, as the distinction between the two concepts is not clear in all languages. There are, of course, languages that make a clear distinction between the two, as for example English, or Norwegian, which has different nouns for game and play (*spill* and *lek*) and different verbs for gaming and playing (*å spille* and *å leke*). But many other languages use just one noun and one verb.[25]

Game and *play* are activities that are strongly related, but also having distinctive attributes. Scholars who have worked on the relation of the two have focused on two main questions: What is the main difference between them? And which of the two concepts is broader, and including the other? The answers given differ[26].

Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman illustrate the relationship between play and game in two figures, presenting the concepts as circles. In the first figure, the circle "games" is included in the larger circle "play". In the second, the circle "play" is included in the larger circle "games".[27] I would like to propose something different. Play and games are intersecting circles: They have a common area, where people play games. In their respective individual areas, play includes other

activities than games and games include other activities than play. Professional gaming (in sports, poker, etc.) is not anymore play, while there are play activities that cannot be identified as games, as for example most of children improvisations or playing with toys.

As *play* is not a part of this study, I will try now to get closer to the meaning of *game*.[28] To start with: as with *play*, the word *game* is related to a concept that is very broad in meaning. In the words of Clark Abt, it "signifies one of those incredibly rich concepts of human activity that have many roots and implications".[29] Therefore, there are scholars claiming that the concept *game* is so flexible and overstretched that there is no meaning in trying to define it[30] while others underline the relativity of understanding and defining the concept.[31]

At the same time, definitions of *game* abound.[32] A modern scholar, Jonne Arjoranda, claims that "games have been defined and redefined many times over, and there seems to be no end to this continual process or any agreement about the definitions".[33] Indeed, the hyperactivity in defining games does not seem to have made the field less foggy. After having studied a corpus of sixty-three definitions of *game* and relevant bibliography, Jaakko Stenros claims that "during the past decade, more definitions of game have been offered than ever before, yet all these new definitions create more polyphony than clarity".[34] One of the main problems is that games have been studied by scholars with very different backgrounds and purposes. This is reflected in the criteria and the cases used to approach the meaning of *game*.

So, what am I trying to do here? For sure, I am not going to add one more definition to the ocean of the existing ones. But since I believe that conceptual clearance is important, I will share in the following some of the products of previous scholarship, so that we will get as close to this slippery concept as possible.

In a study dedicated to game definitions, Jaakko Stenros identifies "ten topics of interest" for those who have tried (or eventually will try) to define games: (i) Games have rules that are of crucial importance for the very existence of the game; (ii) They have a specific purpose and function; (iii) Games are defined as both artefacts and activities; (iv) They are supposed to be separate from the world around them yet connected to it; (v) A game implies someone who enacts the game, i.e. the player (also called in game studies decision-maker, participant, contender, as well as adversary and teammate); (vi) Games have been approached as both productive and unproductive; (vii) A common element in game definitions is the inclusion of competition and conflict; (viii) Another common element is that games have specific goals and end conditions; (ix) Game scholars have constructed a category of games, using various sets of existing games as cases; and (x) Definers of games have offered, and should offer, a list of features games typically have.[35]

Another modern scholar, Jesper Juul, proposes the following six definitional points for what a game is: (1) Games are rule-based; (2) Games have variable, quantifiable outcomes; (3) The different potential outcomes of the game are assigned different values, some being positive, some being negative. (4) The player invests

effort in order to influence the outcome. (5) The players are attached to the outcomes of the game in the sense that a player will be the winner and "happy" if a positive outcome happens, and loser and "unhappy" if a negative outcome happens. (6) The same game can be played with or without real-life consequences. Juul sums up all these characteristics in the following short definition:

> A game is a rule-based formal system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable.[36]

In general, game definers have approached games either as systems (mainly systems of rules) or as activities. The first group of definers approaches games as structural systems, perceiving the game as an entity (a world, universe, or circle) which the player enters with limited freedom or without any freedom at all.[37] The second group focuses more on the players, believing that there is no game without the player and that the player has at least as much decisional power on the game as the game's rules.

A number of definitional points on games have been debated over the years. By way of example, I might refer to the debates on whether games are separate from the world and real life and whether they are unproductive or not.[38] The idea of separateness of the games is part of a broader discussion on what has been in game studies coined as the "game/earnest dichotomy", a dichotomy related to the binaries work/play and life/game which is at least two millennia old.[39] Understanding games as something separated from their physical and social environment was a strong idea in the past, but has during the last decades been the target of much criticism.[40]

Most definitions of games underline that the existence of rules is indeed a central element differentiating game from nongame activities.[41] Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman claim that rules are "the deep structure of a game from which all real-world instances of the game's play are derived"[42] and "the formal identity of a game".[43] It should be noted though that rules, independently of their importance, do not constitute the game alone. There are many more characteristics that play a role in the formation of the identity of specific games. This is proven by the fact that disobedience to the rules does not destroy, or end, the game. A number of scholars claim that what is more important than the rules is the relationship between rules and players. Anne Mette Thorhauge for example argues that "the rules of the game are actually the rules of the player/players".[44]

Closing the discussion of the importance of rules in defining games, I would like to refer to an important point made by Thomas Malaby, who speaks about games as being processual. As games are ongoing process, he writes, there is always "the potential for generating new practices and new meanings, possibly refiguring the game itself". Malaby gives a number of examples to illustrate

the point, from children negotiating the rules of a game before starting playing it to the changes of official rules in professional games due to practical challenges coming up during playing. He concludes that "games are grounded in (and constituted by) human practice and are therefore always in the process of becoming".[45]

Closing the discussion on the definition of games, I would stick to what has been already presented above. Defining the concept *game* is a complex issue and probably the best practice is to identify it by negation, in other words by making clear *what games are not*.

I am turning now to a concept that has become fancy during the last decades: *Gaming*. Gaming as a term has recently been related almost exclusively to digital games, in other words console, video, online and mobile phone games. In this book, I am using the term as signifying something much broader than that, namely *the phenomenon of playing games*, any kind of games. It should be noted that in different publications you will meet other terms that sound very similar to gaming, as for example gameplay (or game play) and game playing. In this book I do not use game playing and I am *not* treating all there terms as synonymous. As mentioned, gaming means the *phenomenon* of playing games in general. Gameplay, on the other hand, means the *act* of playing a specific game and everything related to this act: Strategies, tactics, sportsmanship, cheating, social rules related to the game, etc.

I would like to note that the act of playing a game is very distinct and different from the game itself.[46] Using as metaphor, *game* could be understood as the "hardware" (material artefact, rules, roles, results etc.), *gaming* as the "software" (the social interaction that constitutes the historical realization of a specific game), and *gameplay* as the relationship between the player, the game and the gaming.

Classifications of games

Classifications of games according to various criteria have existed from at least the medieval times. Usually, games are classified either by genre (strategy games, games of chance, war games etc.) or by medium (card games, board games, digital games etc.). The development of game studies during the second half of the twentieth century has enriched both the criteria used and the classifications themselves. Trying to get closer to the meaning and content of the concept *game*, I will introduce here some of the typologies produced by game scholars. It should be noted from the beginning that these typologies fit only partly the needs of a historian using games as a source to analyse the past. But they are indeed a very useful beginning.

Classifying games into specific types is not always an easy task. What makes the task challenging is the multidimensional character of games, their endless variety of characteristics. Roger Caillois goes as far as writing that the multitude and infinite variety of games may lead one who tries to identify principles of classification to despair.[47]

As any classification, the classification of games should be based on the identification of common elements that exist in all games of the same type. But such identification might prove difficult. As mentioned above, classifications of games existed already in the medieval times, if not long before. The main distinction was related to whether the result of a game was decided by chance, skill or a combination of the two.[48]

Based on a cross-cultural study of games and focusing on their ethnographic distribution, John Roberts and Brian Sutton-Smith claimed that there are three main types of games: Physical games, games of chance, and games of strategy. They also added that these types present innumerable cultural variables and that physical games have the widest ethnographic distribution, followed by games of chance.[49]

David Parlett presents a binary typology, based on the amount of information available to the players at any time of the game. There are "games of imperfect information", as for example all card games, in which each player has access to limited information on the situation of the game, and "games of perfect information", as for example chess.[50]

An interesting categorization has been made by the Swedish economist Ingolf Ståhl, who speaks about five types of games, namely: (1) Entertainment games; (2) Educational games; (3) Experimental games; (4) Research games, and (5) Operational games. His typology "focuses on what *kind* of benefits can be obtained, what *time* scale the benefits relate to, and *who* obtains the benefit".[51]

Another sufficient game typology has been composed by Roger Caillois in his ground-breaking work *Man, Play and Games*. Caillois dedicated a chapter to the classification of games, which he divided into four main types: games of competition (what he coined as *agôn*), games of chance (*alea*), games of simulation (*mimicry*), and games of dizziness and disorder (*ilinx*).[52]

Based on the scholarship presented above, I will try in the following paragraphs to draw a brief outline of the game categories that I will refer to in the rest of the book. As you will see, these categories are not impermeable; in fact, they are more often than not intersecting.

Games of competition: Competitive games were categorized by Caillois under the legend *agôn*. *Agôn* is a Greek word meaning contest. Caillois places *equality of chances* and a rivalry on a single quality at the center of the structure of this type of games. It is important that all players start the game on equal, ideal conditions, as this gives incontestable value to the winner's triumph. Speaking about the simple quality that consist the core of the games, he uses the examples of speed, endurance, strength, memory, skill and ingenuity.[53] As for the main goal of the players, this is the recognition of their superiority. And this is exactly the reason why the participation in a game requires "sustained attention, appropriate training, assiduous application, and the desire to win" and implies "discipline and perseverance".[54]

Games of chance: In games of chance, on the other hand, the player's skills and abilities play no role: the result depends totally and exclusively upon fate.

Chance games were categorized by Caillois under the Latin term *alea*.[55] Comparing *alea* to *agôn*, Caillois claims that "in contrast to *agôn*, *alea* negates work, patience, experience, and qualifications. Professionalization, application, and training are eliminated".[56] He sees though some common elements in that "they both obey the same law—the creation for the players of conditions or pure equality denied them in real life".[57]

It should be noted that games of chance differ from both card and board games, as the latter (except a few card games) combine chance to skills. Regarding the historical development of games of chance, we can safely claim that they have been popular from times immemorial. This is also proven by the existence of deities of fortune, luck and fate, as for example the Greek Tyche and its Latin equivalent Fortuna, or the Hindu and Chinese gods of luck. Greek mythology goes as far as presenting the division of governance on the universe between Zeus, Poseidon and Hades as the result of casting lots—Zeus won the heavens, Poseidon the sea and Hades the underworld.

Board games: The absolute criterion for including a game in this category is the surface in which it is played, which in some cases might well be made of a few lines drawn on the ground. Board games may be games of chance or skill or both, games of simulation or other games. They have the ability to engage all kind, and all ages, of people. Johan Huizinga claims that board games have an aura of seriousness, independently of their identity and context.[58]

Card games: Card games are of many types and are distributed all over the globe. They have existed for millennia and sometimes they were simply products of people's intuitive imagination. There exist also card games that are considered sports, as for example bridge. Some card games are played in a board, something that makes the borders between them unclear.

Simulation games: You may think that simulation games appeared in our times, as a result of the technological revolution. You may also believe that simulation games are limited to war games. This is not true. To start with the latter, we have to admit that war games have comprised a significant part of simulation games. But there are many other types of simulation games, as for example business games, where the players simulate the market, or social games, where players choose a virtual reality instead of the physical. Even games as *Monopoly* (Parker Brothers/Hasbro, 1935) are in fact simulation games.

Role-playing games: Role-playing games (also known as RPGs) are games where each player has to take on a role, of a real or a fantastic human or creature, and to play out this role within the framework of a fictional setting. Sometimes, this acting out of the role presupposes or demands the role's development by the player. There are mainly three types of RPGs, namely Tabletop RPGs (also known as TRPG), Live Action RPGs (LRP or LARP) and Computer RPGs (CRPG). In LARPs, the players are expected to perform their role physically, while in Tabletop RPGs they are to do so through discussions. In Computer RPGs the player is performing through an avatar or a character in a digital environment.[59]

Serious games: The identification of this category is based solely on the purpose of playing the game. Game scholars call *serious games* all games that are played to serve a social purpose.[60] Clark Abt, whose 1970-book *Serious Games* opened new ways in studying games, defines them as games which "have an explicit and carefully thought-out educational purpose and are not intended to be played primarily for amusement". He relates them to education, industrial and governmental training, planning, research, analysis, and evaluation.[61]

Sources, aim and scope of the book

Henry Lowood and Raiford Guins have claimed that histories of games might tell us something about the people who played and designed them only if they get related to big questions, broader than the questions on the games themselves.[62] The book at hand tries exactly to guide you in studying game history in relation to important historical questions on sociocultural, political, economic and religious structures, processes and interactions.

The historical study of games and gaming should embrace four different but equally interesting and important areas: (a) The physical evidence, i.e. games and game sets and pieces of any kind; (b) The relevant textual and visual sources, i.e. sets of rules, as well as descriptions and representations of games, gamesters, and attitudes towards games and gaming; (c) The vast ludologic literature, which studies games not only in terms of their internal structure, form, organization etc., but also in their cultural, social, and economic dimensions; and (d) theoretical approaches related to the study of games as historical sources.

In their seminal work *The study of games*, E.M. Avedon and B. Sutton-Smith have registered the following main sources a historian may use to study the emergence and development of games: (a) Artefacts, (b) Graphic information, (c) Ancient writers, (d) Legislation, and (e) Scholarly books and articles.[63]

Artefacts: In this category we may include game boards, dice, cards, and many other remnants of gaming activity that have survived the corrupting force of time and are today treasured in museums and public and private collections. These remnants witness not only of the development of the material side of games, but very often on alterations of their structure, their rules and their meaning. Let us for example think of chess and its remnants. Chess boards witness on various versions of the game, which was not always played in 64-square boards. Chess figures demonstrate changes the game underwent when it was introduced to new cultural and sociopolitical contexts. The differences between iconic and non-iconic figures, and the transformation and renaming of figures in new political and cultural environments may illustrate the point.

Archaeology has revealed game remnants which cover a very long period of time. The oldest surviving game pieces come from an area in modern Turkey and they are approximately 9,000 years old[64]. From then, we have to jump over to the third millennium BC and the Sumerian civilization. A little later, ancient

Egypt comes into the picture. From the medieval times onward, the quantity of archaeological evidence increases exponentially.[65]

Graphic information: Avedon and Sutton-Smith include in this category tomb murals and paintings, vase paintings, and other works of art depicting ancient people playing games. A good example is the famous painting "Children's Games" by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, treasured in the Museum of Art History in Vienna. Crafted in ca. 1560, it depicts a square, where a large number of children are occupied in no less than eighty-three games. The painting may be used as a source for the games played in the Netherlands in the middle of the sixteenth century, when it was painted. Such sources might also be useful in comparative studies. In a 2005-article for example, Bruegel's painting was used as a main source for the comparison of two of the games depicted there to similar games played in French Louisiana in the 1940s and early 1950s.[66]

Ancient writers: Avedon and Sutton-Smith refer to a number of celebrated authors as, for example, the epic poet Homer (8th c. BC), the philosopher Plato (427–347 BC), the historian and biographer Plutarch (45–120 AD), the poet Ovid (43 BC–17 AD), and the historian Tacitus (58–117 AD). Many other writers have, both directly and indirectly, registered evidence not only on games but also on gaming. This evidence is sometimes primary, i.e. related to the period the texts present or analyse, and sometimes secondary, i.e. related to a period that was not witnessed by the author him/herself.

Legislation: In this category, we mainly meet antigambling and gaming regulating laws. Both gambling and measures to regulate it are ancient, at least as ancient as the Roman period. Laws and rules regulating gaming are largely focused on controlling the habit of gambling. It should be noted, though, that laws are normative, not descriptive, historical sources. This means that they witness not of what *did happen* but rather of the gaming function the authorities were trying to establish in the relevant societies. In other words, they reveal what the political regimes wanted, but not necessarily whether the societies at question followed these regulations or not.

Scholarly books and articles: According to Avedon and Sutton-Smith scholarly treatises on games have been produced since at least the end of the seventeenth century. Although these publications focused mostly on the recreative side of games, there are scholars who have examined the use of games for other purposes, as for example educating children or military training.

These are the source types that will be used in the following chapters as tanks of empirical evidence. This evidence will be illuminated with the use of theories from the fields of history, linguistics, culture and material culture studies, political studies and historical sociology.

At this point, it is important to make three clarifications which will help you avoid misunderstandings in reading the book. First of all, sports and other activities that in many periods have been associated with pastimes enter the area of our focus only when necessary, usually to illustrate specific cases. But they are not included in the main subjects of this study. Second, the same goes for

digital games[67]. Digital games are in themselves a new world of gaming and, as such, of studying social and cultural habits and changes, being at the same time one of the most successful industries of our times. But they will also be referred to only complementarily. Third, there are games that have a very limited historical significance, as for example children's improvisation games—although, we have to admit that even those may have a value as historical sources, depending on the subject of the historian's study. In this book, I am focusing on institutionalized games, in other words adult games or games designed by adults for both adults and children. My examples come mainly from the world of board games, card games, and only secondarily from digital games and sports. Even though, I strongly believe that the theories and methods used here may be applied to any type of games.

The main goal of the book is declared by its subtitle. Games and gaming will be analysed as both sources and starting points for the study of how the cultural development interacts with the development in politics, economy, religion and social principles. I am using mainly examples from European history, with illustrating glances to other parts of the globe. Concerning the timespan, the book covers a broad period, from Antiquity and the medieval times (a period very interesting in the development of societies, politics, culture, and games and gaming) to the Renaissance and modern times and in some cases down to the present.

This introduction is followed by two chapters focusing on theory and method, four thematic chapters and three chapters presenting specific cases of games as historical sources.

The following chapter focuses on the conceptual study of games. First, it relates the study of games to the phenomenon of "travelling concepts", in other words the phenomenon of concepts getting new content and meaning when they travel from period to period, from language to language, from place to place, from environment to environment. Then it relates the conceptual study of games to a double method coined in linguistics as "onomasiology" and "semasiology". Which names are used for games, boards, game pieces, movements, strategies and so on? What do these names reveal? And which are the different meanings of these names in various periods or places? Finally, the chapter focuses on the study of how various social, cultural, or political concepts are visualized in games.

Chapter 2 undertakes the task of rethinking games as material sources. It is based on theories from the fields of material history and material culture history. After discussing the material side of games, it focuses on the implementation in game history on a tripartite method, namely Giorgio Reillo's method on History *from* games, history *of* games, and history *and* games. Finally, it proposes nine focal points for an object-based study of any given game as a historical source.

Chapter 3 enters the challenging field of culture. Based on a cultural approach to history, it aims at presenting games and gaming as important elements and valuable witnesses of cultural development. As a first step, it focuses on games as agents and mirrors of cultural values of the past. Then it proceeds to the discussion of games as arenas of cultural meetings and agents of cultural memory. Finally, it reflects on games as a tool for what Antonio Gramsci has coined as "cultural hegemony".

Jumping over from culture to society seems the most natural thing to do. Chapter 4 discusses games as sources of social history. After an introductory discussion of the social function of games, the focus is turned to games as agents of socialization and as mirrors of social structure and interactions. There follows a discussion of games as agents of equality and inequality. Finally, the chapter studies games as sources of gender history, focusing both on femininities and masculinities.

Chapter 5 focuses on the relationship between games and politics. It addresses questions as whether games have been of political importance in past times or whether politics influenced the development of games over time. First, it discusses games as media of visual political communication. Then, it proceeds to the study of games as agents of political history, tools and mirrors of diplomacy, and arenas of "low politics". Finally, it considers political reactions to games as they are witnessed by antigaming legislation.

Chapter 6 studies the relationship between games and the metaphysical world. After a brief presentation of how games were related to the concept of death and the soul in ancient times, it proceeds to the use of games in the world of occultism, focusing especially on the very celebrated case of the tarot cards. Then, it focuses on the use of games as religious didactic tools in various periods. Finally, it discusses the evaluation and regulation of games by religious authorities and their influence to state and local regulations.

Finally, chapters 7, 8 and 9 present the cases of the gladiatorial games, chess and Sid Meier's *Civilization* as historical sources respectively. The choice of these cases is based on a combination of chronological, spatial and ludological diversity. The gladiatorial games represent a European physical violent game in Antiquity, chess is an Asian and later European and then global strategy board game with a history of one and a half millennium, and *Civilization* is an American digital historical game with a huge global appeal the last two decades.

Closing this introduction, I would like to underline that the approaches and theories presented here are by no means exhaustive. Please keep in mind that the world of games being largely multidimensional, their study as historical sources demands a multitheoretical and multimethodical approach. This study could be located in an intellectual area shared by the humanities and the social sciences. It requires openness to interdisciplinarity, to the embracement of theories and methods from game studies, cultural and social history, cultural and social anthropology, sociology, linguistics, archaeology, museology and other scientific fields. At the same time, the historical approach to games has a lot to offer to all these fields as well as to the fields of game studies and cultural game studies.

NOTES

1 See Seville 2016c: 116; Murray 1951: 142–143; Parlett 1999: 95–98; Botermans 2007: 141–152.
2 See Seville 2016c; Seville 2016d: 13–19.

3 See for example Abt 1970: 7, who writes that "all human history can be regarded as gamelike in nature". The question whether life is a game all humans play, consciously or not, is addressed by Suits 1967.
4 The most prominent among them is Huizinga 1949: passim.
5 Mackenzie & Finkel 2004: 13.
6 Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 5; emphasis in the original.
7 Central on the latter aspect are the works of Huizinga 1949 and Caillois 2001.
8 Booth 2018: 57.
9 Avedon & Sutton-Smith 2015/1971: 2.
10 See for example Mäyrä 2008: 5, who names literary, film or media studies, communication research, sociology, psychology, and computer science.
11 See Mäyrä 2008: 6.
12 Caillois 2001: 162.
13 See Huizinga 1949.
14 McCormick 2015: 211.
15 Huizinga 1949: 46.
16 McCormick 2015: 210.
17 On game-metaphors in science, literature and everyday language see Fine 2015: 6–9.
18 To illustrate the point, I may refer to Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, who have defined games proper as "a category that includes board games, card games, sports, computer games, and similar activities" (Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 72).
19 Stenros 2017: 502.
20 Finkel 2007a: 1.
21 Patterson 2015a: 6, referring to McCormick 2015.
22 Wittgenstein 1953: §66–67; emphasis in the original.
23 See for example Midgley 1974: 232–233.
24 Kampmann Walther 2003.
25 This linguistic weakness has been noticed by many scholars. See for example Parlett 1999: 1.
26 See for example Stenros 2017: 512; Edwards 2015: 12; Avedon & Sutton-Smith 2015/1971: 7; Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 72; Prensky 2001; Nachmanovitch 1990: 43; Midgley 1974: 242.
27 See Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 72–73.
28 For definitions of *play*, see Huizinga 1949: 8, 11, 28, 46; Caillois 2001: 5–7, 162, 175; Malaby 2007: 96; Carse 1987: 4.
29 Abt 1970: 5.
30 See for example Skaff Elias & Garfield 2012: 5–6; Parlett 1999: 1.
31 See for example Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 72, 82; Stenros 2017: 515.
32 See for example Fine 2015: 6; Kurbjuhn 2012: 179; Klabbers 2009: 33; Aarseth 2007: 130; Frasca 2007: 70; Malaby 2007: 96; Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 80; Dempsey et al. 2002: 159; Caillois 2001: 9–10; Sniderman 1999: 2; Avedon 2015/1971: 419, 422–425; Avedon & Sutton-Smith 2015/1971: 7; Abt 1970: 6–7.
33 Arjoranta 2014 (in the article's abstract). His main point in the article is that "such an agreement is not necessary".
34 Stenros 2017: 499–500.
35 See Stenros 2017, including very useful bibliography.
36 Juul 2003, where he also deepens in his six points. In a later publication, Juul presents games as "rule-bound and mostly goal-oriented activities that differ from other goal-oriented activities in that the primary consequences of game playing are negotiable rather than obligatory" (Juul 2016: 351).
37 The rules-based approach to games is coined as *formalism*, i.e. "the view that the essential nature of a game is its rule-set and that proper play involves obeying the rules" (Nguyen 2017: 9).
38 See Caillois 2001: 9–10; Juul 2003; Stenros 2017: 509.

39 See Curtius 2013, who traced a "panegyrical topos" of *ludicra-seria* back to the Augustan era.
40 See for example Stenros 2017: 505; Malaby 2007; Patterson 2015a: 7–9; Stevens 1980.
41 See for example Patterson 2015a: 7; Caillois 2001: 27.
42 Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 120.
43 Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 121 and passim. It should be noted that rules are central in their understanding of games, in fact one of the three schemas they use to study games and game design.
44 Thorhauge 2013: 389. She studies digital games, but her conclusion may be applied to any type of games. See also Tulloch 2014: 348.
45 See Malaby 2007: 102–105, here 102.
46 See for example Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 303: "Game play is the formalized interaction that occurs when players follow the rules of a game and experience its system through play". They present game play as one of their three categories of play, the other two being *ludic activities* and *being playful*.
47 See Caillois 2001: 11.
48 See Arcangeli 2003: 111.
49 Avedon & Sutton-Smith 2015/1971: 433, referring to Roberts & Sutton-Smith 2015/1962.
50 Parlett 1991: 18–20.
51 Ståhl 1983: 32–34, here 32; emphasis in the original.
52 Caillois 2001: 12.
53 See Caillois 2001: 14.
54 Caillois 2001: 15.
55 It should be noted here that although Caillois uses the ancient Roman term *alea*, his understanding of the term is not the same as in Rome, where *alea* signified games "in which elements of luck and skill were combined in the moving of pieces on a marked plane surface in accordance with fixed rules and the throws of dice" (Purcell 2007: 90).
56 Caillois 2001: 17.
57 Caillois 2001: 19.
58 Huizinga 1949: 198.
59 On role-playing games see Maccallum-Stewart 2016; Fine 1983; Bowman 2010.
60 On serious games see Abt 1970; Rodriguez 2006 and Kurbjuhn 2012.
61 Abt 1970: 9–10.
62 See Lowood & Guins 2016: xi–xii.
63 See Avedon & Sutton-Smith 2015/1971: 21–26.
64 See Finkel 2007a: 1.
65 See Avedon & Sutton-Smith 2015/1971: 21.
66 See Comeaux 2005.
67 Throughout the book, I am using the term *digital games* for all games employing computing technology, as for example video games, console games, arcade video games, games played on personal computers, tablets, mobile phones and other devises.

1

CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES TO GAMES

Kings and queens, bishops and jokers, homes and prisons, area control and castle building, buying and selling, tiles and tickets, ladders and sandboxes, death and survival, attack and defense, tactics and strategy. Most of the names we use for game pieces, or moves or the overall ways of playing a game, are metaphors of concepts used originally in warfare, politics, social organization, cultural interactions, economic activities and everyday life.

Even though, the study of game concepts is still a white spot on the map of the game world, an unexplored area waiting for its study. From a historical perspective, the study of concepts related to specific games played in specific periods may shed light to the relevant historical entity's notion of human identity, everyday life, sociocultural and political interactions, or even warfare. As we will see in the following chapters, the names of game pieces, rules, tactics, or strategies illustrate the interaction between the magic circle of a game and the cultural, social, political and economic context in which the game was designed, produced and played.

But the study of game concepts is not easy and unproblematic. One of the main problems encountered by historians (as well as any other scholars in human and social studies) is related to the fact that most concepts do not always have the same content and the same meaning. This is something that applies to a considerable amount of social, cultural and political concepts. Concepts like democracy, justice, culture and truth, for example, have been discussed for centuries without getting a content we all, or at least most of us, may agree upon.

Before getting to the varied meaning of game concepts, I would like to say a few words on the difference between *word* and *concept*. Although they are often used as synonyms, the two terms are different. A word is just a series of letters or sounds put together to signify something. If this something is an object (a book, for example) the word remains a word. But if this something is an abstract idea, or a practice or a historical phenomenon, the word signifies a concept, for example

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the concepts of humanity, truth, or education. In some cases, a word that originally signifies an object may become a concept, if it reflects a political, social or cultural context and meaning. The word *book* is a word when it signifies a book in a library, but it becomes a concept in the expression "religions of the book" (referring to Judaism, Christianity and Islam), as the word *book* here signifies the holy texts the three religions are based on, or in the expression "by the book", as here it signifies a set of rules or principles.

Conceptual studies focus on the content, meaning and development of concepts. An important dimension of the historical study of concepts is related to their relation and interaction with what Reinhart Koselleck has coined as historical situation (*Zustand*).[1] Such a perspective is something game scholars, game historians and historians in general might, and indeed should, include in their study of past games and gaming. Focusing on the relevant conceptual dimensions of games and gaming means in fact an effort to understand game terminology (a) as the result of a constant dialogue between games and historical reality and (b) as something that is susceptible to changes related to alterations of the historical reality in social and/or cultural and/or political terms.

The study of a game from a conceptual perspective could be based on two questions. The first focuses on the empirical evidence: Which terms are used to name the game itself, its pieces, sections, or movements, or its rules, the players, the expected or demanded interactions between players, or the ways players consider and use the rules? The second is analytical: What can we learn by studying these terms? The latter question might be approached from two different perspectives. Game studies could learn a lot about the game itself and its development in time. Human and social studies would focus on what we might learn about the inventors, designers, producers, promoters, sellers and buyers, and finally players of the game.

These questions, particularly the second, might be answered by using various methods, as for example hermeneutics or content analysis. Most conceptual approaches are efforts of contextualization: The concept at question has to be studied in relation to its historical context, which in its turn has several dimensions, the linguistic and the cultural being probably the most important ones. For the historian, such a contextualization cannot be only spatial, i.e. dedicated to political and cultural geography. It must be temporal as well, i.e. related to the period(s) at question. When trying to contextualize in terms of time, the historian should always remember that "the past is a foreign country"[2] and that one of the most serious mistakes s/he may make is to look at the past through her/his present eyeglasses. This includes the study of concepts: Every time we consider the use of a concept in the past, we have to be aware of its meaning in its specific period.[3]

What makes things more difficult is that various environments (scientific, political, social, cultural, professional, with many more) often build up their own content for various concepts that are central in their inquiries. Sometimes, concepts may be very useful when we try to describe one thing and may turn useless when used to describe something else that is supposed to belong to the same semantic field, as for example when one tries to describe games of different

types. Think for example of sport games as football, card games as poker, board games as backgammon, digital games as *Civilization*, or any fantasy role-playing game, and imagine the challenges related to the use of the same concepts to speak about these so very different games as games.

Travelling game concepts

To understand better the challenges related to concepts changing meanings in different environments, I would like to refer to the theory of travelling concepts[4], which we owe to the Dutch cultural theorist Mieke Bal. She writes:

> [Concepts travel] between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographically dispersed academic communities. Between disciplines, their meaning, reach and operational value differ. These processes of differing need to be assessed before, during and after each "trip". […] Between individual scholars, each user of a concept constantly wavers between unreflected assumptions and threatening misunderstandings in communication with others. […] Between historical periods, the meaning and use of concepts change dramatically. […] Finally, concepts function differently in geographically dispersed academic communities with their different traditions. This is as true for the choice and use of concepts as for their definitions and the traditions within the different disciplines, even the newer ones like Cultural Studies.[5]

At this point, I would like to say just a few words on the reasons why I present this theory. First, any kind of historical research includes the study, or at least the use of concepts. You consider concepts every time you read any kind of historical text, every time you read a novel or the newspaper. I hope that from now on you will do it knowing that there is a possibility that the writers of the texts you read do not necessarily mean exactly the same as you do when they use any given concept.

Second, this applies to the study of things that look extremely familiar, as for example games and gaming. The world of games is full of concepts that play significant roles in understanding not only the games but also the players and their intensions.

Finally, when it comes to the definition of games and gaming, an introduction to the theory of travelling concepts may help us understand the plurality of definitions and definitional approaches—approaches that are both spatial and temporal (and in some cases, both). Referring to spatial approaches, I mean that we should be aware of the fact that in the same period the same concepts may have different meanings in different places or environments. This applies not only to different countries or linguistic environments, but also to different scientific or social environments.

Let me try to illustrate by a very brief conceptual discussion of chess. By studying the names used in various areas and/or periods for the chess pieces and movements, and especially by contextualising these names, the historian may

come up to important conclusions about both the game and the historical entity, or entities, at question.

Originally, the names and the movements of pieces reflected the Indian (and later the Persian) army and warfare in the period of the invention of the game, sometime in or before the sixth century. The *shah* (king) had by his side the vizier, his counsellor or adviser, a piece rather weak, as he could only mode one square diagonally. The rest of the pieces reflected the four divisions of the army: Elephants, horses (cavalry), chariots and soldiers (infantry).

Centuries after its invention, chess was introduced to medieval Europe and underwent changes to fit better to its new political, social and cultural environment (as we will see in Chapter 3, this process is called culturalization). As monarchy was also the dominating political system in Europe, the king remained the central piece of the game. The name of the *shah* was simply translated into *king*. The vizier survived for some centuries as *ferz* (in some places, for example in Russia, the piece is still called *ferz*). But later, the vizier was replaced by the queen, which finally became the most powerful piece of the board. This replacement and the changes it caused in the rules of the game has been discussed as reflecting changes in the position of women in medieval society as well as their participation in the execution of political power.[6] The elephant was transformed into an officer, or, in most places, a bishop. In other places, the piece was called runner or messenger or fool. But the most common names of bishop and officer reflect the power that the Church and the army had in medieval Europe as two of the pillars of socio-political systems, an influence illustrated in their position of the piece just beside the royal couple. The horse was also transformed into a human being, the knight; a symbol of military and social power, but also of the feudal system of medieval Europe (let us not forget that the feudal lords were usually depicted in medieval art as mounted on their horses). The chariot became a tower, symbol of the castles and the defensive walls that protected medieval societies from their enemies. The soldiers, finally, kept their name and function. But in some places, as for example in Norway, they were also transformed and renamed into peasants. So, the pawns were those who would fight or produce, or both.[7]

Summing up, by reflecting on the original names of chess pieces and their changes in the medieval space-time, we realize that even if remaining for the most part the same, the game was changed from a military into a sociopolitical simulation. In medieval Europe, the political power was centralized in the hands of kings and queens, but the church and the army as institutions had a crucial, and sometimes vital, role to play. The provinces were ruled by feudal lords, with local social and political power. Towers and strong walls dominated the landscape, being one of the trademarks of medieval times. Within and outside the walls of cities and towns, the majority of ordinary, non-privileged people dedicated their lives to fighting as soldiers or producing as peasants.

The study of names used for chess pieces might be enriched by more local piece names and names of movements and tactics. Analytical questions on what we might learn by studying the relevant game names and concepts might

vary; I would claim that the possibilities are many, depending on the starting point of contextualization. Let me turn to another example related to modern times. Gary Alan Fine considered how names of chess pawns were influenced by changes in the political system and thinking after the Russian Revolution in 1917. Studying the sociopolitical culture of chess in communist Russia, he underlines that "while Russian chess has a 'king,' the word used for *king* is *korol*, not *czar*", adding the fact that the atheist Russians still call the bishop an elephant. He also refers to other names of game pieces used in other places, to turn to an analysis of the relation between political changes and game terminology.

> An account of the naming of chess pieces reveals much about the societies in which they are used. At moments of transition, as in the Middle Ages, names are "in play." At the time of the American Revolution there was an attempt to rename king, queen and pawn as governor, general and pioneer. After their revolution Soviets wanted to use the name commissar and to turn black into red, with its pieces representing the proletariat. Such changes, however, could not overturn the inertia of collective knowledge. These fights over metaphors indicate how tightly linked chess is to the social structure of its location and how its location affects its image.[8]

To Fine's interesting points I would like to add another one. The resistance of players in changing game terminology established over a longer period of time demonstrates a tendency in history: Changes in concepts, top-down changes in particular, are not easy. Sometimes this is related to the power of tradition, sometimes it is the result of what Fine calls "inertia of collective knowledge", a kind of a strong dependence to the past that prohibits, or at least hinders, (any kind of) change and innovation.

Conceptual travels of game names and terms might cause misconceptions in the work of game scholars, historians and other human and social scientists. This section had the main task of underlining the challenge and asking for conceptual awareness and consciousness in the study of games. In the following pages, I am presenting one of many methods that might be used to reach such consciousness.

Game onomasiology and semasiology as historical lenses

The method I propose as a tool to avoid misunderstandings related to the content and meaning of game concepts (and concepts of any kind) is double. In fact, it is two methods closely related to each other: *Onomasiology* and *semasiology*. Let us consider them briefly, based on their comprehensive definition by Iain Hampsher-Monk, Karin Tilmans and Frank van Vree.[9]

Onomasiology derives from the Greek word for name (*onoma*). It signifies "the study of the different terms available for designating the same or similar thing or concept". In other words, onomasiology charts the names, i.e. the terms/words, a collective entity uses to designate an object or a concept. To study for example

the onomasiology of the concept *game* in the Viking world, you should identify all the terms used to designate *game* by the Vikings. To study the onomasiology of chess in the same period means to identify all the words that were used to designate chess as a game, as well as its various components (pieces, movements, rules, etc.).

Semasiology, on the other hand, derives from the Greek word for denotation (*semasia*, which also means meaning and significance). Semasiology "seeks to discover all the different meanings of a given term". In other words, it seeks to map all the various meanings a term has in a specific spacetime. Such a study should be conducted "in terms of ranges of characteristic synonyms, antonyms, associated terms, forming a more or less unified part of a vocabulary at a given time". Which are for example the meanings of the Old Norse word for *game*? To quote Johan Huizinga,

> Old Norse *leika* […] has an extraordinarily wide range of meaning, including 'to move freely', 'to lay hold of', 'to cause or effect', 'to handle', 'to occupy oneself', 'to pass the time', 'to practice'.[10]

Names used for games, game pieces and game movements may sometimes reveal very interesting elements of sociocultural development. Recall for example the communistic struggle to change the names of chess pieces in Russia after the 1917 revolution mentioned earlier in this chapter, so that they would fit the new political situation. Both change trends and stability in game names should be examined, as they both might reveal important evidence for the study of the historical entities behind them. In the following chapters, we will consider characteristic examples of both change and continuity.

This double method fits very well the comparative synchronic study of games, as well as the diachronic study of the development of specific games in time. There are at least four possibilities for implementing it.

a. *Diachronic study of specific game concepts*: In this case, you might use the method to map the terminology of the game within the limits of specific political or cultural entities (you may think of nations, linguistic regions or geographic areas with common features) over a long period of time. Are there any changes in this terminology? If yes, why? And do these changes reflect changes in the political or sociocultural context?
b. *Synchronic study of specific game concepts in one historical entity*: The aim here is to study the onomasiology and semasiology of the game in a limited period of time in a specific group of people. Focusing on any historical entity, you might identify variations within its borders, related to different types of players or users of the game concepts. Think for example of variations between children and adults, intellectuals and non-intellectuals, or players belonging to different social classes, races or genders. The main aim here is to identify conceptual variations and contextualize them, in an effort to

understand how these variations reflect the relevant historical background, in social, cultural, political, economic, anthropological, anthropogeographical and sometimes philosophical terms.

c. *Synchronic study of specific game concepts in two or more historical entities*: The aim here is the same as in point (b) but the study includes different historical entities (civilizations, cultures, states, nations, cultural areas etc.). Here you may choose a game and create its onomasiological and semasiological map. When you have done so, you get deeper into common elements, similarities and differences as starting points for the discussion of transportations and translations between the historical entities at question, as well as the reasons for the implementation of incremental or radical changes.
d. *Comparative synchronic study of two or more games*: This is an alternative similar to the previous points (b) and (c). The only difference is that here you might study two or more games that belong to the same game family or type. What does the onomasiology of these games reveal in terms of similarities? Is there a concept, or a set of concepts, repeated in various games? If yes, why? The aim here is to see if there are common trends and differences and try to analyse the reasons behind them.

Composing the onomasiological and semasiological map of games is just the beginning of a historical study of any game (or any type/family of games) in conceptual terms. The real historical work starts right after it has been completed. The next step is to analyse the map by implying to it historical working questions relevant to the aim of your project. The questions you might ask are countless. In the next section I will present just a few of them, illuminated by concrete game cases.

Studying game concepts and their visualization

A first working question might be: *Which concepts are included in a specific game (or type of games)?*

As a case we might reflect on the tarot card pack.[11] Which concepts are visualized in tarot? And how? To study that, we might focus on the figures of the so-called Major Arcana. A very brief introduction first: Even in our days, there is a common perception of tarot cards not only being a means of fortune-telling and divination but even of being invented for exactly that reason. Despite its widespread diffusion, this perception is wrong. Tarot had had a long history as a card game, at least from the fourteenth century,[12] before they entered the supernatural world in the eighteenth. Tarot games are still played for entertainment in various places, mainly in Italy, Austria, Hungary, France, Switzerland, Sicily, Czechia, Slovakia and parts of Germany.[13]

The tarot pack (also known as *tarocchi*, *tarock* or *trionfi*) have existed in various forms, the most common consisting of seventy-eight cards (there are also varieties with fifty-four or fewer cards), divided into five sets. Four of the sets (consisting

the Minor Arcana) have suit symbols, namely Swords, Batons, Cups and Coins.[14] Each suit has fourteen cards: Ten numbered from Ace to Ten (in most cases in Latin numerals, from I to X) and the figures of King, Queen, Cavalier (or Knight) and Jack. The fifth set, the Major Arcana, has twenty-two cards, known as triumphs, trumps, or atouts. Twenty-one of them are numbered, usually in Latin from I to XXI, and they all are named (as the most popular pack has been the Tarot de Marseille, they often are known by their French names). With slight differences from pack to pack, they are named as following: I the Mountebank (or Magician or Juggler; *Le Bateleur*), II the Popess (*La Papesse*), III the Empress (*L'Impératrice*), IIII the Emperor (*L'Empereur*), V the Pope (*Le Pape*), VI Love (or the Lover; *L'Amoureux*), VII the Chariot (*Le Chariot*), VIII Justice (*Le Justice*), VIIII the Hermit (*L'Hermite*), X the Wheel of Fortune (*La Roue de Fortune*), XI Fortitude (*La Force*), XII the Hanged Man (*Le Pendu*), XIII Death (usually unlabelled in the cards), XIIII Temperance (*Tempérance*), XV the Devil (*Le Diable*), XVI the Tower (*La Maison Dieu*), XVII the Star (*L'Étoile*), XVIII the Moon (*La Lune*), XVIIII the Sun (*Le Soleil*), XX the Judgment (*Le Jugement*), XXI the World (*Le Monde*). The most characteristic figure of this set of cards is the Fool (*Le Mat*), who is not numbered and in most tarot games has a special role (see below).

It is not my aim to discuss the intriguing deeper meaning of the cards, which has inspired passionate debates over the last two centuries. My purpose is to propose questions for further historical study, in other words questions that treat the tarot cards as historical sources in terms of concept visualization. So, which and what type of concepts are included in the Major Arcana? And how are they visualized?

For our purpose, I would dare to roughly categorize the cards of the Major Arcana in two groups: (a) Concepts which could, in real life or at least in theory, personified or materialized and thus are visualized in a concrete way directly related to their nominal content and (b) Abstract concepts that could only be visualized in symbolic ways. The first category includes the figures of Mountebank, Popess, Empress, Emperor, Pope, Chariot, Hermit, Hanged Man, Tower, Star, Moon, and Sun. The abstract concepts include Love, Justice, Wheel of Fortune, Fortitude, Death, Temperance, Devil, Judgment, World and the Fool.

The contextualization of concepts included in a game, in this case tarot, demands taking into consideration the rules of the game, which attribute different levels of power to different cards. This is not the right place to discuss the various forms of tarot games in depth, but I will draw a brief outline. They are trick-taking or trick-and-trump games, i.e. games played in tricks, in which the triumph cards play the role of trumps.[15]

Taking into consideration that there are many local variations, let us have a look on the basic characteristics of tarot games. To start with the value of the cards: There are "blank" cards (which give no point) and point-giving cards, in varying point systems, the commonest of which is presented by David Parlett as follows: (a) From the Major Arcana, triumphs I (Mountebank) and XXI (World) and the Fool give five points each; (b) From the Minor Arcana each King gives

five points, each Queen four, each Cavalier three and each Jack two. The points won by each player are counted at the end of the game, according to the rules of the specific version played.[16]

As in all trick-taking games, all players start with an equal number of cards at hand. Each trick opens with the first player opening one of his cards. This card decides which the winning suit of the trick is. Each trick is won by the highest-ranking card of this suit played[17]. If a player does not have at hand a card of the suit led, s/he must play out a triumph card. Triumphs win over all suit cards. If more than one triumph is played in the same trick, the higher triumph wins. The Fool is used not as a trump but as an excuse; this means that a player may play out the Fool to avoid losing a point-giving suit card or a triumph.[18]

Taking local point systems and game rules into consideration, a historian might draw useful conclusions about the historical entities that produced the game or adapted its point system and rules in various periods. From a political perspective, s/he could ask why the King and Queen give points while the Empress and the Emperor do not. From a sociocultural perspective, s/he could ask why the Mountebank and the Fool score so highly while the religious figures do not give any points. From a cultural perspective, why the World is the highest triumph and why it is these abstract concepts that are included in the Major Arcana and not some other. Furthermore, s/he could ask why the abstract concepts are visualized the way they are, something we will come back to discussing the next working question.

But before proceeding to that, I would like to note that in the same pattern, you might reflect on which concepts are included in games with a sociocultural content, as for example *The Checkered Game of Life* (Milton Bradley, 1860), the *Mansion of Happiness* (Laurie & Whittles, 1800), *The Pilgrim's Progress* (McLoughlin, 1893), the *Game of Dont's and Old Maid* (McLoughlin, 1905), or in various parlour games and countless digital games.

A second working question could be: *How is a specific concept visualized in a specific game?*

Let us start by reflecting on the concepts included in the tarot Major Arcana. Its twenty-two figures have been studied from various perspectives, particularly as equipment of future-telling and esoteric insight. For example, following the theories of Carl Gustav Jung, psychologists studied the tarot figures as symbols of Jung's archetypes,[19] while gender scholars related tarot to feminism.[20] As our purpose is the study of games as historical sources, let us reflect for a moment on how the visualization of concepts in the Major Arcana could help us get closer to the sociocultural background of tarot designers and producers—this applies to designers and producers of both game packs and, later, divination packs, as well as packs for groups and sects with special identities and interests.

The triumph figures could be studied both in synchronic and diachronic terms. As this is not the place for such a study, I will limit myself to proposing but a few starting points. What does it mean that the World is personalized as a naked woman, surrounded by the symbols of the four Evangelists: Matthew's angel,

John's eagle, Mark's lion and Luke's winged ox? How is the Devil depicted: As a human being, as Baphomet, in another form? What is the form of the Tower? Is it painted according to an existing, a mythological or a biblical building, as for example the tower of Babel, or is it depicted according to architectural types of towers of the period? How is the Wheel of Fortune visualized? And what about Temperance, Power and Justice? And why is it so that in some decks the concept of erotic love is depicted as Eros suiting his arrow to two people (traditionally a woman and a man) while in other packs he suits to a man surrounded by more than one woman?

To take more games into consideration: How is happiness presented in the final wining square of the board game *Mansion of Happiness?* And how are depicted all the other social and cultural concepts included in the same game? Or how is heaven depicted in Indian boards of *Snakes and* Ladders that include a heavenly part on their top?

A third working question could focus on the following: *How is a specific concept visualized in different games played in a specific period and/or by a specific historical entity?* How for example are concepts like happiness, death, evil, gender, process or family life visualized in games?

By way of example, let us focus on the latter. Which activities demonstrate everyday life at home in card, board or parlour games? Which members of the family participate in these activities? Please reflect on the basis of the following evidence: During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in a considerable number of games, the figure of the father is absent. Children sitting around a table or playing with their mothers is the most common picture. And if all members of the family are depicted, what does their position or their body language reveals about gender differences and sociocultural norms and beliefs of the period and the place?[21]

Chapters 3–6 examine games as sources for the study of cultural, social, political and religious/metaphysical history. In these chapters, I will not refer explicitly to the conceptual approaches to games discussed here. My focus will be on the ways a historian might use games in her/his historical inquiries and on the theoretical approaches that might illuminate the evidence s/he will reach by studying games. The aim of this chapter was to enrich the methodological arsenal of the historian, so that s/he will be able to employ an extra dimension in her/his game-based cultural, social, and political studies. But let us take one step at the time. First, we should examine games as mirrors of the past in material terms.

NOTES

1 On this relation and its four possible variations see Jordheim 2012: 164.
2 "The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there" is the opening sentence of L.P. Hartley's novel *The Go-Between*, published in 1953. The idea of the past as a world different from any "now" has inspired philosophical and theoretical discussions on the study of history; see for example Lowenthal 2015.

3 A powerful example is the concept *aristocracy*, a term of ancient Greek origin. If a historian projects our modern conception of aristocracy to any ancient Greek city, s/he will commit an anachronistic mistake. In our days, aristocracy signifies the highest class in a society, while in ancient Greece aristocracy was a form of government and its meaning was, at least in theory, rule by the best citizens.
4 Travelling concepts may also be met in literature as "transferred concepts" or "nomadic concepts". On travelling concept in humanities and cultural studies see Bal 2002 and Neumann & Nünning 2012 respectively.
5 Bal 2009: 20.
6 See Yalom 2004.
7 On changes of chess piece names after the introduction of the game in Europe and how these changes reflected the feudal hierarchy, see Eales 1986: 17–18.
8 Fine 2015: 9.
9 Hampsher-Monk, Tilmans & Van Vree 1998: 2. On onomasiology and semasiology (which have mainly been discussed in German literature) see also Geeraerts 2009; Koselleck 2004: 76–81; Baldinger 1980: 110–112, 206–211, 275–309.
10 Huizinga 1949: 38.
11 On the tarot pack and its relation to the occult see below, chapter 6.
12 See Hargrave 2000/1930: 31. On the history of Tarot, see Dummett 1980: 3–191; Dummett's main points are presented in Penco 2013.
13 See Parlett 1991: 238, who also notes that "modern Tarots are of three functional types: those produced for playing games, those intended for fortune-telling, and those designed for collectors".
14 This is the older original tradition. A newer tradition follows the French system of the suits known from the 52-card packs, namely Spades, Clubs, Hearts and Diamonds; see Parlett 1991: 240.
15 Trick-taking games are games which start with all players having an equal number of cards at hand. They are divided in rounds and tricks. In each round, a dealer deals out an equal number of cards to the players (depending on the numbers of the players and the rules of the game, there might be one or more rounds in a game). A trick is an individual cycle of the table, in which each player plays out one of her/his cards. Normally, one player wins all the cards of the trick before the game proceeds to the next tricks (and eventually rounds), until the pack is fully played out. The final winner is the player who wins more tricks or gathers most card points.
16 See Parlett 1991: 241–243. For various versions of the game see Dummett 1980: 164–573.
17 Ranking systems vary slightly, but in all systems, the four court cards have the highest ranking, the King being the highest, followed by the Queen, the Cavalier, and finally the Jack. In some systems, the Ace is the highest-ranking card among the numbered ones, in others it is the Ten, while there are also combined systems (for example, 10 being the highest in Swords and Batons, the Ace in Cups and Coins).
18 Let it be noted that there are variations of the game, in which the Fool is not used as an excuse, but as the highest or lowest triumph, numbered XXII or 0 respectively.
19 See Semetsky 2014, with further bibliography.
20 See Gearhart & Rennie 1981.
21 You might reflect for example on family mentality in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American society on the basis of the pictures published in Hofer 2003: 2 (n.d.), 24 (1897), 27 (1897), 35 (1910), 122 (1897), 146 (1898); Seville 2016d: 30 (c. 1890). In regard to theoretical and methodological approaches to studying how family as a unit was represented in the past in cultural terms, you might see Jordanova 1991, who studies the representation of the family in eighteenth-century images, mainly visual but also verbal (her study is not related to games).

2

MATERIAL APPROACHES TO GAMES

In 2001, the first Xbox video game console was released by Microsoft. It was accompanied by a controller that very soon got nicknamed "the Fatty" and then "the Duke". The reason for the nicknames was its large size, as it was designed to fit the hand of the average American man, making gaming uncomfortable for women and men with small hands, as for example men outside the West.[1] Later, this design mistake was corrected and the controller (and thus the console) became friendlier to all players, independent of gender and body type.

This is a characteristic example of how the material side of games might illustrate social, cultural and sociocultural priorities. Games, game pieces, game equipment and game architecture could be very interesting sources of material history and equally valuable material sources of social and cultural history. Unfortunately, the material dimension of games has not been given the academic attention it deserves. The aim of this chapter is to invite to a more thorough discussion of the "objectness" and materiality of games as historical sources and to present, in the last section of this chapter, proposals on how a historian might study the material side of games as historical sources.

Such a study would have much to gain from a dialogue with the fields of material history and material culture. Therefore, a short introduction to the historical study of material culture could prove a useful opening to a historical discussion of games as objects. Let me start with the classic definition of material culture and the study of material culture by Jules David Prown:

> Material culture is […] the manifestations of culture through material productions. And the study of material culture is the study of material to understand culture, to discover the beliefs—the values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions—of a particular community or society at a given time. The underlying premise is that human-made objects reflect, consciously or

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> unconsciously, directly or indirectly, the beliefs of the individuals who commissioned, fabricated, purchased, or used them and, by extension, the beliefs of the larger society to which these individuals belonged. Material culture is thus an object-based branch of cultural anthropology or cultural history.[2]

The study of objects remained outside the focus area of the historians for a long period of time. This has started to change only a few decades ago, when objects escaped obscurity and started to assert their rightful role as valuable historical sources. History has always been a logocentric discipline, based mainly on textual sources and using other sources as illustrative examples and supporting arguments on evidence deriving from texts.[3] Material remnants from the past though are not only very valuable supplementary sources, but in some cases, they are the only or the most important source we have. To quote Adrianne Hood, by dismissing or ignoring objects "we neglect a source that can lead to unique, often inspired, questions about the past".[4]

Material culture is expressed in objects of any kind (in the relevant literature the terms *artefacts* and *things* are also used to express the same concept) and in historical information related to these objects, preserved usually in textual and, in some cases, visual or oral form. There are many ways of studying material culture and equally numerous methods of doing material history.[5] Furthermore, there are many ways to approach an object and many levels of analysing it.[6] This is not the right place to discuss them. To avoid misunderstandings, I would like to make clear that my approach to games as objects is a material culture history approach and my strategy is using the material side of games to answer social and cultural questions about the past. Answers might be given by examining these questions on the basis of the evidence offered by the relevant objects and the related textual, visual and/or oral sources. In other words, I am approaching games from an anthropocentric cultural perspective often related to social and political interactions and development.

But how could the study of objects be of importance for the historian? As I mentioned before, objects have been usually used as additional material to supplement textual and oral historical evidence. But there are also cases when the very existence of an object might challenge the established narrative about an event, a period or a historical entity. This is often the case with findings in archaeological excavations that challenge the established chronology or our "knowledge" on this or that society or culture. In other cases, the existence of specific objects creates new questions to the past that would have not been raised otherwise.

Regarding the relationship between textual and material evidence, the historian should keep in mind that, in Leora Auslander's words, people "use both things and words to communicate, to remember and to express themselves, but both the *what* and the *how* of words and things are different". This is exactly why the study of material culture is of crucial importance: because it gives the historian "access to the extra-linguistic range of human meaning-making and communication".[7]

What is more important is that object-based history is more "democratic" than its text-based counterpart. Object-based history is not solely "written by the winners", as we tend to say for history in general, usually meaning exactly that texts are composed, edited, censored or even erased from records and memory according to the needs and plans of those in power. A considerable amount of material history is indeed also "written" by the winners—monuments, memorials, sculptures and paintings witness to that. But the material world also keeps visible (and thus studyable) this part of past life, interaction and development that has not been evaluated by the "winners" as worthy enough to be part of the historical record. As Sara Pennell has noted, "material survivals could 'speak' of those in the past who had little or no textual 'voice'".[8] This is something that applies significantly to games as historical sources.

The material side of games

Games have a strong material dimension. Thus, they are valuable sources for the study of material culture and material history. As we will see in the following chapters, game sets and game equipment were used in the past (to name just a few functions) as social status symbols, diplomatic gifts or media transporting cultural elements from one cultural environment to another. The material dimension of games is related to a number of areas and the relevant disciplines, from architecture to the design, production and circulation of boards, cards, dice and everything else that has been used to play games. An important task of the historian is to place all these manifestations of material culture into a historical narrative on the historical entities (individuals and groups) who have designed, commissioned, produced and/or used them.

The material study of games, as the study of objects in general, belongs to both social and cultural history. On the social side, it offers evidence, among other things, on the materials a society had access to and the relevant usage, as well as the society's technological level, divisions between those who could afford the ownership of games and those who could not, and sometimes on social borders and gender-related evidence. On the cultural side, the material dimension of games reveals a lot on objects and materials related to pastimes, aesthetic values and priorities, as well on habits related to everyday life or special occasions, as for example feasts and family or community ceremonies.

It should be noted from the beginning that game sets and game equipment do not speak for themselves. This is a principle relevant for all objects, which, to quote Richard Grassby, "do not usually offer a clear message, or even an adequate picture, of everyday life".[9] Games, in particular, are artefacts made to be used in concrete ways dictated by the rules of the game they were to realize. This means that most game objects (at least those produced industrially) are made with a very generic human type in mind: the player. In pre-digital times, it is only the materials and the decoration of the game that showed whether a game was produced for a specific player type, as for example the noble player. As objects,

games were also designed, produced and decorated to serve other purposes, as we will see for example in the chapter of politics. In such cases, the relevant artefacts are not anymore simply game objects but also media of direct or indirect communication.

In an article published in 2018, one of the few publications discussing the material study of games, the American cultural historian, media scholar and game designer Carly Kocurek presents some of the challenges related to the study of games as objects. One of her strong points is her worst-case scenario, in which the material study of games "becomes slavering fetishism, a celebration and embrace of the object's very objectness that exists at a remove from the people who have designed, made, and used these things".[10]

Kocurek continues by underlining that the study of games as objects must be conducted by taking carefully into consideration the values and assumptions embedded in the games, as well as the players' clear and important agency, and by always being aware of the differences between the system of the game and the human agency in its gameplay. She proposes that historians should approach the materiality of games

> the way Marxists do, talking not just about the things but how they come to be; working to understand not just the material systems of games themselves but the ways in which games become part of material, cultural, political, economic and labour systems.[11]

Another American media scholar, Paul Booth, referring to board games also underlines the importance of the human agency in relation to games. In his words, "the game itself as a mutable, textual, tangible object does not *come into being* without the addition of player agency".[12] To get closer to this understanding of games as objects and their role as material sources of history, I am turning to a theory presented recently by the Italian cultural historian Giorgio Riello.

History from games—History of games—History and games

In an essay published in 2018, Giorgio Riello proposes three varieties of historical analysis related to objects and the material world. He coins them as *History from things*, *History of things* and *History and things*.

History from things is according to Riello an enquiry "in which material artefacts are used as raw materials for the discipline of history and the interpretation of the past".[13] In *History from things* the object (in our case a game type, a family of games, a group of identical or similar game sets or a specific game set and even individual game pieces) is the primary source from which the historian will extract pieces of evidence relevant for her/his project. In some cases, the object might be the very evidence itself. On the basis of the object, the historian will interpret the past. What is important here is that "objects should not be used as an aid for providing enhanced answers, but for asking better questions".[14] It should

also be noted that, as Riello's case study of the eighteenth-century stomacher shows, the heuristic value of objects often depends on the narrative the historian relates them to.[15]

History of things, which is the main stream in the history of material culture, may be defined as "the historical analysis of the relationships between objects, people and their representation".[16] In *history of things* each object is studied as a historical event; the historian focuses on the object itself and might study its design, production, ownership, function and use, as well as its relationship to its context, be it social, cultural, economic, political or of any other type. Riello uses his second case study, a seventeenth-century broken porcelain wine glass, to underline an important point, that *history of things* projects might be transformed into tools for rethinking wider narratives.[17]

In *History and things* the historian is asked to position objects "outside history altogether" and use them to exactly challenge the established concept of analysing the past through written language. *History and things* "provides a qualitative pay-off for historians: The capacity to unlock more creative and freer ways of conveying ideas about the past that are not necessarily mediated by written language in books and articles produced by professional historians".[18] In such a project the object is neither a source on a historical entity or period, nor the subject topic of the project; instead, it is supposed to be juxtaposed to a narrative on an entity or a period, so that object and narrative will be studied at par.[19]

The distinction between Riello's three varieties of object-based historical projects is based on three different combinations of a dialogue between the studied object(s), the methodology(-ies) used by the historian and the narrative(s) to which the evidence from or on the object(s) will be related. In *History from things* the historian starts by focusing on the object, then comes the methodology used to focus on one or more specific historical sides or dimensions of the object and finally comes the choice of narrative(s) that will host the evidence. In *History of things* the historian starts with methodology and according to this methodology s/he chooses a narrative in which s/he contextualizes the studied object, whose history will be analysed in terms of the methodology and the narrative chosen. In *History and things* the object is studied in relation to a narrative, while the methodology might be chosen according to this relation and the type of the project.[20]

Game-based history could gain from all three approaches. As primary sources, games and gaming places may open up material windows to the past that cannot be opened by written sources alone. Along with the relevant written and visual sources, traces of the material culture of games form a triangle of evidence which is of utmost importance for the historian who tries to analyse past societies through the games they played. This triangle may offer complementary answers to questions related to the development of technology, ways of production and consumption, commercial interactions and globalization, cultural meetings and influences, aesthetic principles, as well as other relevant issues.

An element that may be studied by the historian is related to the architecture of games, from the Roman amphitheatres to modern stadia and gaming halls. These

architectural pieces may be studied in relation to their style and construction quality, as well as to aesthetic values and decoration, but also their functionality.

The games themselves are witnesses of material culture. The materials used give a picture of what the society at question had access to, eventually in which prices, which materials were evaluated as aesthetically approvable by the various socioeconomic strata, what was affordable for the middle and lower strata and so forth. Furthermore, board and card games may be studied as visual sources, depicting various elements of importance for the historical study of a period, as for example buildings, physical environment, technology, uniforms and clothes etcetera. Game studies use almost exclusively the *History of things* approach. Game-based history usually uses games as *History from things* sources. This is how I use games in the following chapters as well.

Studying games in terms of material history

I am closing this chapter by proposing nine focal points for an object-based study of any given game as a historical source. Depending on the character of the game and the material at disposition, a historian may focus on some of the following material dimensions of the game studied. The term game might signify in the following paragraphs a game set, game equipment or individual game pieces.

Identification of the game: A good description of the studied object is always a very important first step, particularly when the object is unique and/or handmade. Even for industrially produced games, a thorough description might reveal differences from other known examples, which were probably produced elsewhere. Material, quality of production and, if relevant, weight and other characteristics should be included. If known, the price of the game should also be noted, eventually in comparison to prices of other goods in the same period and place, as an indication of whether the game was affordable or a luxury product. In case the object studied is not clearly identified, the historian should be careful in proposing an identity and s/he should argue as strongly as possible for her/his proposal underlining that it is not more than a well-argued guess.

Provenance of the game: Identifying the place where a game was produced is of importance not only for the *History of the game* but also for the *History from the game* and in some cases also as an element of *History and the game*. On the basis of comparisons to identical or similar games produced in other places, the historian might raise and/or answer questions related to cultural contacts, influences and interactions. It could also be possible that the identification of the provenance of a game in relation to its dating might challenge established historical sociocultural narratives.

Decoration of the game: Strongly related to the identification of the game is the presentation of its decoration, both the decoration that is related to the gameplay but also that which simply serves aesthetics or promotion purposes. In many places and periods, game sets and equipment were not only meant as objects of gameplay; particularly in the higher strata of the society, they were also elements of the social apparatus of the household and as such they were media of social

communication. Furthermore, the ornament of even industrially produced game equipment, as for example the back side of playing cards, reveals aesthetic principles and art elements of the period of the production. Let us not forget that, as Karen Harvey has noted, "aesthetic features can serve as illuminating evidence for historians, in particular articulating the often unspoken beliefs and assumptions of a society".[21] Special attention should be paid to game sets and pieces that are in fact pieces of art. Handmade *Mancala* boards for example are indeed masterpieces of African woodworking.[22]

Visual communication: Games are multifarious media of communication. Sometimes this communication is well thought of to serve concrete purposes (see for example the case of the French revolution playing cards presented in Chapter 5). But games might communicate things indirectly as well. Many games of different types (board games, card games, digital games) include aesthetic and cultural elements that the player gets in contact with every time s/he plays the game, even if s/he does not like them. As the main function of the game is that of gaming entertainment, disliking its aesthetic or cultural elements becomes secondary for the player; s/he will play the game anyway. This means that game sets and equipment become an agent of aesthetics and culture that infiltrates the everyday life of the player independently of, and sometimes even contrary to, her/his own preferences and taste. Thus, they contribute to the homogenization of culture or at least of specific cultural elements. Nowadays, the internationally marketed digital games do exactly that on a global scale.

Textual communication: Game objects are often media of texts. Rules printed on game boards or pamphlets accompanying the game equipment, pieces of historical, social, cultural and other evidence that are printed on game equipment as part of the game and texts that constitute a part of the game decoration are characteristic examples. Some of these texts communicate messages that are not related to the game, being thus related to their carrier as a sociocultural object, not as game equipment. A characteristic example is found in a board of *The Royal Game of Cupid* produced in Paris in 1640, whose track has the form of a snake. A text printed on the board, including mainly the rules of the game, communicates conservative evaluations of erotic love. Explaining the snake form of the track, the text says that this is so "because love in the guise of a Serpent slides into the hearts of those whom he possesses and poisons them with venom".[23]

Function and use of the game: As every object, game objects have a specific purpose—to serve the players on their gameplay. Many game sets and game equipment though might be used for purposes not related to their original function.[24] One of these uses might be related to the very ownership of luxury game sets, or even simple game sets, which might under certain circumstances function as a symbol of social or even political culture[25]—see for example in Chapter 4 how games might witness on inequality or how the ownership of Mancala boards were used in some places in Africa as a symbol of social and political power. To study the function and use(s) of any game, the historian has to connect it to its historical context. What is interesting here is that some games belong to

a category of objects whose context is often transnational and transcultural, and sometimes international and intercultural. One way to approach such games is by taking into consideration that their function reflects a specific context (the one in which they were designed, produced and originally played in) while their use(s) might reflect various historical contexts, different between them.

Gameplay-related design of the game: Every game is designed not only as an object, but also as equipment that creates a gameplay experience. The main working question here is: What does the design of the game related to its gameplay reveal about the historical entity that designed, produced and played the game? The example of "the fatty" Xbox controller that opened this chapter is characteristic. But such an approach to games might reveal elements of aesthetics, cultural principles, or cultural interactions. Another example is presented by Colin Mackenzie and Irving Finkel, who have noticed the attention paid to the aesthetics of games by the Japanese, who designed and produced *go, sugoroku,* and *shogi* boards in a way that makes the sound the pieces make when they struck against the board an experience in itself.[26] The same goes for other game equipment, as for example backgammon boards produced all over the world. Think also of the feeling of holding playing cards of various paper qualities and keep in mind that the experience of playing a game is more often than not a tangible experience.

Known material history of the game: I would like to underline that this part is only supplementarily related to the history of the game in general. Here the historian focuses on the ownership history of the studied game set, equipment or piece. If necessary, s/he will juxtapose this material study to the history of the game as a game. Furthermore, the history of game sets and equipment might include their display in museums and exhibitions. Studying a game as part of an exhibition, the historian has to get into dialogue with the archaeological and museological description, presentation and analysis of objects. Various theoretical and methodological approaches might be used to study the material history of the game. Two approaches that are widely used in material culture history are the so-called "object biography" and "object life cycle". Karin Dannehl claims that the two methods function complementarily as "the biography highlights exceptional features while the life cycle study puts the focus on generic features".[27] In a case related to the cultural history of an ancient Roman game piece, Laura Banducci used the theory of object biography to identify a *tessera* token and discuss it in the background of its cultural use.[28]

The game as a commodity: Particularly in modern time, that is in a period of industrial production of more and more games of any type, games have become commodities that are to be advertised and sold in a very competitive market. And particularly since they are not essentials, they are commodities that must, at least until they become trends, be especially attractive in order to sell. This means that the material study of games opens a window to advertisement practices and principles, as well as the economic, social and cultural values that were related to the promotion of material goods. In studying a game as a commodity, the historian might be supported by the fields of economy, communication studies and psychology of taste and consumption.

NOTES

1 See Kocurek 2018: 69.
2 Prown 1993: 1. The same arguments on the importance of studying material history to understand past societies had also been expressed by Schlereth 1982: 3.
3 See Auslander 2012: 360 and Hood 2009: 176.
4 Hood 2009: 176.
5 Both fields have produced great works of evidence, theory and method. It is with deep concern of being unjust to many other high-quality contributions I dare the following proposals as starting points for entering the material side of history and culture (all including relevant bibliography). For an introduction to the study of material culture in historical terms and objects/things as historical sources see Harvey 2018a; LeCain 2017; Gerritsen & Riello 2015; Thatcher Ulrich & Van Gerbig 2015; Bennett & Joyce 2010; Hoffmann 2008; Grassby 2005; and the *Journal of Material Culture* (established in 1996; https://journals.sagepub.com/home/mcu). For an introduction to the interdisciplinary field of material culture studies see Tilley et al. 2013; Hicks & Beaudry 2010; Auslander 2012; Hood 2009; Joy 2009; Appadurai 1986.
6 Hood 2009: 180 for example writes that "there are many levels on which one can analyse an artefact: the micro, which includes a detailed material(s) analysis and the macro which helps recover its context and cultural meaning".
7 Auslander 2012: 355; emphasis in the original. See also the excellent metaphor of Pennell 2018: 223: "The textual trace of objects is to the physical object as musical notation on the page is to the sound of the piece being played—illegible unless one can 'read' the trace and 'know' what it means, and also work out what is going on between the notes".
8 Pennell 2018: 222.
9 Grassby 2005: 597.
10 Kocurek 2018: 66–67.
11 Kocurek 2018: 69.
12 Booth 2018: 58–59; emphasis in the original.
13 Riello 2018: 27.
14 Riello 2018: 32.
15 See Riello 2018: 33–35.
16 Riello 2018: 28.
17 Riello 2018: 39.
18 Riello 2018: 29.
19 Riello 2018: 44.
20 See Riello 2018, table 1.1.
21 Harvey 2018b: 5. On ornament as an important element of material culture, see Morall 2018.
22 This is richly illustrated in De Voogt 1997 (with sixty illustrations in total). See also the website of the British Museum (www.britishmuseum.org; search for "mancala boards" in the option "Explore the collections").
23 See Seville 2016d: 37.
24 On the difference between function and use of artefacts see Eaton 2020.
25 Grassby 2005: 596 claims that this is a general phenomenon related to the ownership of objects. In his words, "the display of possessions has always demonstrated new status, protected the existing hierarchy within and between groups, and announced social standing and allegiance".
26 Mackenzie & Finkel 2004: 17.
27 Dannehl 2018: 171. Dannehl's essay is a very valuable introduction to the two methods and the differences between them.
28 See Banducci 2015.

3

GAMES OF CULTURE

Otio prodimur (it is our leisure moments which betray us)!

In just two words, the Roman author, lawyer and politician Pliny the Younger expresses a powerful thesis: It is not our occupations that really reveal our worth, but our leisure activities.[1] Even those who would evaluate the thesis as an exaggeration would recognize that there is at least some truth in it. Our leisure activities can indeed reveal something about our personal culture. What is most important for the historian is that this might be applied to collective entities as well.

As part of our leisure activities, games are sources of cultural studies in general and cultural history in particular. Of course, the role of games as witnesses of culture is in most cases additional. But sometimes the historical information offered by them is of high value.[2] This chapter aims exactly at understanding and presenting games and gaming as important witnesses of culture[3] and, as such, important sources of cultural history.

Various theoretical approaches have been used to illuminate game and gaming as sources of cultural history.[4] In the following pages I will try to discuss both games and gaming as sources of the historical realization of cultural values, cultural meetings, culturalization, cultural globalization and cultural hegemony.

The idea of relating games to cultural phenomena and the culture of past societies and social groups is not new. In fact, a number of game scholars have claimed that games are better understood if studied from a cultural perspective. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman list themselves among them, when they write that "all games are part of culture. Just as any game can be framed in terms of their formal or experiential qualities, they can also be framed according to their status as cultural objects".[5]

Johan Huizinga is also a scholar who was aware of the importance of play (including playing games) in culture. In fact, he went much further. His seminal

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work *Homo Ludens* is based on the very idea that all culture *arises, or emerges, from play*.[6] Another important scholar of culture and games, Roger Caillois, commenting on Huizinga's theory, writes that

> in some respects the rules of law, prosody, counterpoint, perspective, stagecraft, liturgy, military tactics, and debate are rules of play. They constitute conventions that must be respected. Their subtle interrelationships are the basis for civilization.[7]

Caillois also speaks about the relationship between culture and games by claiming that "games are largely dependent upon the cultures in which they are practiced".[8] Regarding the importance of games in understanding culture, I may also refer to the Indian T. R. Radmanabhachari, who, more than seven decades ago, evaluated pastimes and games as very significant in studying human life and human institutions.

> Human life and human institutions can be better understood by—and indeed cannot be thoroughly understood without—a study of the life of primitive peoples including even their pastimes, the games they played, the sports they engaged in. […] Play patterns are an integral part of all human culture wherever mankind is found and in whatever state of advancement the culture may be.[9]

Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman underline the importance of games as sources for the cultural study of a given society. They understand them as social contexts for cultural learning, embodying and passing on the values of the society. "Seeing games as social contexts for cultural learning" they write "acknowledges how games replicate, reproduce, and sometimes transform cultural beliefs and principles".[10]

Roger Caillois had written something very similar, understanding games as cultural factors and images and presenting them—a civilization's popular games in particular—as diagnostic tools we may use to analyse a civilization. He writes that games reflect cultural patterns and introduce us to "the preferences, weakness, and strength of a given society at a particular stage of its evolution".[11] This happens because the influence of games is not limited to the players, but it extends to the whole cultural environment. This influence reflects very often concrete social values, patterns and functions.[12]

Apart from supporting the study of culture and acculturation, games may also be a valuable source for the study of cases of deculturation. Elliott Avedon and Brian Sutton-Smith make that clear when they write that "cross-cultural studies indicate that there are some cultures that do not have competitive games. These non-game cultures seem to be of two kinds—those that never had games, and those that have lost them through a process of deculturation".[13]

When studying games, we should be aware of the fact that a considerable amount of them has a strong multicultural character. This means that the cultural study of games has to take into consideration a number of different features. When it comes to the very subject of the historic-cultural study of games, Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman focus on the interaction between the game, as an open cultural system, and the surrounding sociocultural environments.[14] In other words, this means that the historian should focus on how a game (that is: rules, structure, organization and gameplay) influences sociocultural values, principles and practices, and how it is influenced by them. And this is just one of the approaches a historian might use.

A final point should be underlined here. There are various types of culture: High culture, low culture, learned culture, popular culture, national culture, religious culture, material culture, etc.. Due to their multidimensionality, games are related to all these types, probably to every type of culture. Because of that, the study of games may reveal variations related to place or period, social attributes and even individual characteristics.

Countless cultural history approaches might be applied to the study of games. In the following text I am discussing just a few of them. First, I will propose a study of games with a focus on the promotion or realization of cultural values, to proceed to the discussion of games as agents or arenas of cultural meetings, cultural memory and cultural hegemony and resistance.

Games and cultural values

Mancala (also spelled *Mankala*) is one of the most traditional games in Africa. In fact, it is a family of games, having in common that they are played in a board of two to four rows of six holes (that could also be dug on the ground) by two opponents or teams, who use twenty four pieces (stones) each and aim at winning as many pieces of the opponent as possible while rearranging in turn and clockwise the stones in the holes of the board.[15] *Mancala*, which is a strategy game without any element of chance, has been compared by experts and non-experts "to war, trade and numerous other situations in which goods or people change hands, resulting in the pieces being called soldiers, cows, money, prisoners or wives".[16]

One of the scholars who studied Mancala thoroughly, Philip Townshend, has approached the game from an anthropological and cultural perspective. Doing so, or to do so, he also focused on contrasts in African and Western mentality on the gameplay and the qualities of a good player. He compares playing Mancala in Africa to playing chess (an equally purely strategic game) in Western societies. What he sees is "a silent, long-thought-out battle between two solitary superior intellects with all external distractions reduced to a minimum" in the West, which he contrasts to a "noisy social game played ideally with the absolute minimum of time for reflexion amidst a persistent barrage from both

players of distracting commentary, boasts, and bluff and from the onlookers of advice and appraisal" in Africa. He also adds an important detail, related to the mentality of playing the game in some places in Africa, namely cheating, writing that

> a wide variety of "cheating" techniques are used, and the only stigma attached to this is that of detection. Public reaction to detection is not outrage but derision of the incompetent fool who got caught.[17]

Even if it is a dangerous generalization to speak about such a mentality being "African" in general, Townshend's observation is noteworthy. At least in some local societies the cheater is not stigmatized for cheating but for being caught! This is quite the opposite of what one should expect in other cultural areas, where cheating is in itself an important reason for getting stigmatized or at least negatively evaluated.

Mancala has also been studied as an enculturating device[18] and as a case study (together with geomantic divination) of Africa's contribution to global cultural history, which showed that "Africa is not merely a passive importer of culture but also a place of active production, transformation, and export of culture for global use".[19]

Mancala is just one case; there are countless examples of games that witness on various elements and dimensions of culture. There are for example games that witness on the knowledge level of a society. We may recall the *Game of the Sphere or of the Universe (Le Jeu de la Sphere ou de l'Univers selon Tycho Brahe),* published in Paris in 1661. This is a typical Goose-type board race game played on a spiral board. The players move in the playing track by throwing a teetotum and their final aim is to reach first the final square of the board. What is important for us here is that the content of the game, as presented in the game board, witnesses on the combination of four knowledge systems: Natural (Ptolemaic) philosophy, biblical knowledge, astrology and classical knowledge. This demonstrates that all these knowledge systems were not only heuristically accessible but also appreciated in seventeenth-century France.[20] A second example is another Goose-type game, this time a British one, namely *The Wonders of Art* (London, Wallis, 1820), which offers a picture of the British corpus of art masterpieces in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Its squares are engraved with "an eclectic mixture of ancient wonders and modern inventions" which gives us a picture of which human achievements were evaluated in nineteenth-century England as exceptional.[21]

There are also games that functioned as vehicles, or symbols, of cultural changes in a society. Vyacheslav Shevtsov for example studied how playing card games became a symbol of the westernization of the Russian society, and of the leisure class in particular, after the introduction of playing cards in Russia in the second half of the eighteenth and more intensively in the nineteenth- century. He claims that "spending one's pastime over a game would highlight one's belonging to the free and Europeanized elite that had the leisure time to waste away their days and nights, unlike the servile classes that were occupied by labor".[22]

Historians may also think of games as witnesses of what Norbert Elias has coined as *the civilizing process*. Studying sport and leisure from this specific perspective, Elias and Eric Dunning make a point related to the rules of physical games, as for example boxing. By studying the development of rules, they claim, we see a decreased tolerance on violent moves, which leads to their conclusion of a cultural development in the relevant societies towards less and less raw violence. They also claim that by simply comparing football and rugby (both "inventions" of the nineteenth century) to folkgames played with a ball in the late Middle Ages or even in early modern times, one notices a considerable decrease of violence and an increasing sensitivity against it.[23]

Finally, we could study games and gaming as sources for the study of cultural trends. One way of doing so is by studying how different cultural groups have understood and evaluated the same type of games. Thousands of pages are written about the cultural perception of the gladiatorial games or the Olympic Games from the ancient times to our days.[24] These are cases of discussing cultural trends on large scale. But the world of games offers the possibility of studying cultural trends on a lower scale, not as highly structured as the public spectacles. An example from Antiquity may suffice: Discussing *alea* in ancient Rome, Nicholas Purcell juxtaposes Romans and Germans in relation to their drinking-and-playing culture. Referring to Tacitus, he writes that the Germans were "playing at dice while sober, considering it part of their serious business", something that would be unthinkable to the Romans.[25]

In the following text, I am proposing two ways of getting closer to the cultural profile of past societies or social groups by studying the games, or types of games, that appealed to them the most. First, I am reflecting on the basis of Caillois' categorization of games. Second, I am looking on games as agents of cultural values.

Competition, chance, and role-playing games as cultural mirrors

Martin van Creveld closes his study on *Wargames: From Gladiators to Gigabytes* by wondering why the most popular of all games in history were also the deadliest.[26] His alarming conclusion calls for a reflection not only on the relation between death (and violence) and the popularity of games but also on the cultural criteria deciding on the popularity of games. This interrelation between the cultural profile of a historical entity and the popularity of games among its members has been noticed by other scholars as well. Roger Caillois for example has claimed that there is a relation between games and culture patterns and traits:

> It is […] possible that the variability of cultures, on the basis of which each has its culture pattern and characteristic traits, can be correlated with certain games that are prevalent even though not popularly regarded as beneficial.[27]

Should we agree with Caillois on this thesis? In other words, should we accept that it is possible to better understand and analyse cultures by examining the games that were prevalent in them, even if not always evaluated in the most positive terms? Before answering, let us take into consideration that Caillois goes a step further by claiming that even "the very destiny of cultures, their chance to flourish or stagnate" may be studied in relation to its preference to specific types of games.[28]

Caillois categorizes games under four rubrics: (a) *Agôn*, i.e. games of competition, such as football, war games or chess; (b) *Alea*, i.e. games of chance, such as roulette or dice; (c) *Mimicry*, i.e. games of imaginative role-playing; and (d) *Ilinx*, i.e. games based on whirling or falling, producing a state of dizziness and disorder.[29] By using these four categories as analytical tools, we may come closer to the basic characteristics of the cultural entity we study. It sounds logical to focus on the two first categories, competitive games and games of chance, which have been prominent in most historical times and most past societies.

Regarding *agôn*, our study should not focus only on which games a historical unit played, but on what we may call game-and-gaming-culture: *how* they played these games (rules, locations, surroundings, materiality of the games etc.) and which material and immaterial values they attached to them.

Let us start with the games played. Games of competition may be categorized according to the percentage of physicality or intellectuality needed not only to win but even to participate. At the one end of the scale we may put clearly physical games, where mental skills play a secondary role, and at the other intellectual games, where physical strength is not at all necessary. By studying which games were preferred by a cultural entity we may evaluate its culture accordingly. The same goes for the percentage of violence and peacefulness in a game. Why is it so for example that shooting games are much more popular today than chess?

Competitive mind games might introduce another criterion for studying historio-culturally a game, or games in general: The relation between games, knowledge and critical thinking. In studying knowledge games, two important aspects are: (a) If they demand critical thinking or not; and (b) If they are open to chance and to which extent. Let us for example think of the TV-game *Who wants to be a millionaire?* (published also as a board game by various publishers after 2000). The game is based on the efficiency of the player to memorize, not to critical thinking. Furthermore, it is organized in a way that, at least theoretically, it is possible for a totally ignorant person to win the game, purely by luck. Although this should be studied more thoroughly, I dare to claim that in modern times, the more open a cultural entity is to chance in knowledge games the lower is the educational level of the entity and the period.

Let us now turn our focus to games of chance as study lenses. Using games of chance to understand and evaluate past cultures, a historian might focus not only on the types of games played (dice games, card games, roulette etc.), but also on the evaluation of these games by the authorities and groups of cultural and intellectual power. Games of chance were in various periods banned or evaluated as vicious or even nefarious, mainly due to their close relation to gambling.

Studying games of chance, a historian may focus on the introduction of chance elements into games of competition that is to say on the combination of *agôn* and *alea*. A typical example is the introduction of dice to chess in medieval times, to make it shorter and more open and challenging. The *Libro de los juegos* (*Book of Games)*, a treatise on games played in Spain in the thirteenth-century commissioned by the king of Castille Alfonso X "the Wise" (1252–1284), witnesses that the use of dice was introduced to chess "so that it could be played more quickly". It also registers that 6 was assigned to the king, 5 to the queen, 4 to the rook, 3 to the knight, 2 to the fil and 1 to the pawn.[30] There are, of course many other games combining strategy and chance, as for example backgammon and many card games.

Mimicry games were not as popular over time as games of competition and games of chance. We may say that they experience one of their best periods in modern times, when physical and digital role-playing games (RPGs) have become very popular.[31]

When studying RPGs of any kind and in any period, a historian may focus on a number of issues and study questions. To limit ourselves to just a few: What kind of activity do these games simulate: war, politics, sports, economy, social life or something else? What kind of characters is popular in various periods and games? Which historical and contemporary figures are popular? Which are the predominant settings?

Games as agents of cultural values

The *Checkered Game of Life* was designed and produced in 1860 by an American lithographer, Milton Bradley. It was a race board game, in which the player was supposed to get through a life journey of originally sixty-three squares, from infantry (which is how the first square is called) to old age. In fact, it is one of many morality games produced in the USA in the nineteenth century. The player could move one of two steps right, left or diagonally, following the throw of a teetotum, aiming at winning the game by gathering hundred points. What makes the *Checkered Game of Life* a morality game is the rules related to the value of specific spaces that were marked with sociocultural virtues and vices, reflecting consequences and traits. Landing on some of these squares gives points to the player: College, Fat Office, Honor, Congress, Success and Happiness give five points each. Landing on some other squares improves or worsens the board travel of the player, in other words her/his life: School leads to College, Influence to Fat Office, Bravery to Honor, Honesty to Happiness, Perseverance to Success, Politics to Congress, Ambition to Fame and Cupid to Matrimony (Fame and Matrimony giving no points). Two squares (Government Contract and Industry) lead directly to Wealth, the only square that gives ten points. Happy Old Age gives fifty points, and the player may arrive at this square only through her/his wandering in the board of life. Regarding vices, Idleness leads to Disgrace, Intemperance to Poverty, Gambling to Ruin, Crime to Prison. A noteworthy

element of cultural change reflected in the board is that the space called Suicide, which removed the players landing on it off the game, was replaced in later versions. All in all, the *Checkered Game of Life* was a game that aimed at teaching that success in life was directly related to integrity.[32]

Bradley's game was based on a prototype published in London in 1790 by John Wallis and Elizabeth Newberry, *The New Game of Human Life*, a racing game played on a spiral track of eighty four spaces, each representing a year of the human life. This was too, according to a statement printed on the board, a "utility and moral tendency" game. It demonstrates various pieces of evidence very interesting for a historian. Each space for example is illustrated with the miniature of a human being representing a social or sociocultural identity or property. Some of the figures are recognizable, some not. Christopher Rovee, who studied the game, refers to Alexander Pope as "the Poet" (space 41), William Pitt as "the Patriot" (55), the Prince of Wales as "the glutton" (59) and Isaac Newton as "the Immortal Man" in the final and winning space 84 (which also reflect the age of death of Newton). The study of the board is thus a source on social and sociocultural properties and identities that were evaluated as central in life, but also on figures that were, one way or another, distinct in the society of London at the end of the eighteenth century. Furthermore, Rovee notes that "though advertised in its subtitle as 'the Most Agreeable and Rational Recreation Ever Invented for Youth of Both Sexes,' the game is entirely male-centered, charting a masculine path through seven distinct twelve-year 'ages'".[33]

As all games of life, this game reflects conceptions of time in the period of its production (for example that life is divided into seven ages of twelve years each), as well as perceptions of the sociocultural development of a human during her/his lifetime. The board is indeed a mirror of social practices, as for example education and recreation, and cultural values and principles, or virtues and vices incorporated in the rules of the game as rewarding and punishing. The comparison of similar games of life published in different countries also reveals differences in the prioritization of specific practices, values and principles.[34]

Games like the *Game of Life* (in its various versions from 1790 to the present, when it is marketed under the simpler name *Life*) or the *Mansion of Happiness* (Laurie & Whittles, 1800),[35] which had the same aim and was based on more or less the same principles, reveal considerable evidence on the cultural profile of the societies that played them. While moving on the board, the player is instructed in the virtues and the values of the society s/he lives in, reflecting at the same time on the negative consequences of vices and misdeeds.

Values of various kinds might be correlated with games; they may be cultural, political, social, religious, cognitive, or economic. Sometimes, comparing the values related to the same game or the same family or type of games in different periods may help the historian to get a better insight in the cultural development of the historical entity at question. Which are for example the values that were related to the Olympic Games in Antiquity? Are they the same as those related to the games in modern times?

Games as sources of cultural history might be divided into two types: (a) primary sources, i.e. games that *aimed at introducing* to cultural values and their realization in life; and (b) secondary sources, i.e. games *witnessing* on past cultural values and identities. In the first type we may include games like *The Checkered Game of Life, The Mansion of Happiness, Virtue Rewarded and Vice Punished* (Darton, 1818), *Snakes and Ladders*[36] and many others. Concerning games witnessing on past cultural values, we may think of the following elements witnessed:

a. Messages communicated in the content of the game, its package, its pieces, or even the advertisement of the game. A characteristic example is the presentation of gender in relation to games and gaming (see the next chapter).
b. Perceptions of the same games in various periods and cultural environments. In this case, cultural perceptions could also be interwoven with political and social perceptions, as for example in the case of the Olympic Games, which have been an arena for political use and abuse, but also a field where various cultural perceptions were applied or projected.[37]
c. Sociocultural rules and perceptions related to the gameplay. Think, for example, of the tournament outfit of players of tennis, billiard, or even card games; the ceremonial handshakes before the beginning of many games and after their ending; or various rules of fair play. Or think of the Roman understanding of how random and difficult it is to succeed in erotic life: The highest possible combination of dice or *astragali* in games of chance was named after Venus, the goddess of love.[38]
d. Conceptions related to winning or losing a game might also reveal cultural elements. Consider, for example the simple question whether the competition is absolute or not, in other words if a draw is approved by the game culture or not. A simple example may suffice: no ancient Greek or Roman should understand how it is possible that a football game, which to their eyes would be clearly a game simulating war, may end up without a winner. This very simple fact reveals an important cultural difference between Antiquity and the modern period.

Let us now recall the Vikings. The study of games in medieval Scandinavia attests on cultural evidence also known from other sources, as for example the violent temperament of the Viking culture. Ball games, combat games and even board games could easily end up in violent episodes or players killing each other and even observers. Apart from being a confirmation of something already known, this piece of evidence shows that violence was an omnipresent phenomenon in medieval Scandinavia, making its appearance even in the Viking pastimes.[39]

Killing over a game was not, of course, limited to the Viking world. A Chinese source for example records that the emperor Wen (179–157 BC) was so mad after having lost a game of *Liubo* against the son of King of Wu, that he killed his opponent by throwing at him the game board. This resulted, according to the source, to a revolt by the king of Wu.[40]

A comparative perspective of the game-and-gameplay-culture may offer the historian valuable insights to central elements of the cultural entities that played the games studied. Let us for example think of the public games of the ancient Romans, the ancient Greeks and the Byzantines. In all three cases, the public games were important means of identification. All three civilizations were based on cultural approaches that promoted and evaluated very highly the element of competition. This was tellingly expressed in the Olympic Games, the gladiatorial games and the games performed in the Byzantine Hippodromes.

The Olympic Games had a constitutive significance for the formation and maintenance of what we could call Greek identity or at least of the feeling of belonging to the same civilization—the Olympic cycle was even the basis for the ancient Greek calendar.[41] A similar role was played by the gladiatorial games, which were employed in a process of Romanization of the multicultural and multilingual Roman Empire (see Chapter 7). In Byzantium, public games, mainly chariot races, were held in the Hippodrome; apart from entertainment, they had the role of demonstrating the wealth, power and sophistication of the empire, thus strengthening the proudness of being a Byzantine.[42]

Let us try to compare these three cases of public games in cultural terms, even if in very thick strokes. By looking at the outlook of the participants, we notice that nudity was the rule in Ancient Greece, very limited in Rome (total nudity was not allowed) and almost totally absent in Byzantium. Violence was very limited in Ancient Greece, central in Rome, almost absent in Byzantium. Many public games, in all these historical periods, were related to religion, one way or another. In all three civilizations women and slaves were excluded, as participants and in most cases as spectators too (with very few exceptions, as for example the participation of slaves as combatants in the gladiatorial games). In all of them, masculinity, power, skilfulness, and prowess were highly valued. There are, of course, more common and differing elements to be found in a more thorough comparison of the three cases. Such a comparison could help the historian get a better picture of the cultural development in the Eastern Mediterranean area in Antiquity and the Byzantine times and its main agents and reasons.

Reflecting on the three cases presented earlier, we may think of a general question that is of utmost importance for the historic-cultural study of games: Which cultural elements are reflected in the game(s) we study? The question is based on the thesis that each game is directly related to and influenced by a specific cultural background, which is normally that of the designer/producer/organiser or that of the players (if these two groups do not belong to the same culture). Let us think of modern times. Even if this is something that should be examined thoroughly and even if taking the risk of oversimplifying, I would dare to claim that most contemporary international games promote only one set of cultural values: the so-called Western (see for example the case of *Civilization*, presented in Chapter 9).

Sometimes, the study of games may support the historian to illuminate cultural elements in sociopolitical changes, where for example the "old" comes

into contact or conflict with something "new" that introduces qualitative alterations. Let me refer once more to the work of Philip Townshend on *Mancala*. Townshend speaks about its replacement in various societies by "modern" games that were introduced due to the European colonization of various African areas. What is important for us is that he comments on the cultural differences between *Mancala* and the new "European" games. As I would never present the point as well as he does, I prefer to cite his evidence and thoughts, apologising on beforehand on the length of the citation.

> It is true to say that colonisation has occasioned a great loss of popularity for the game: other sedentary games, such as checkers, cards, and ludo, have competed with *mankala* for pride of place, especially in urban areas, and in some cases have almost killed the game altogether. Whereas *mankala* was firmly embedded in the traditional social matrix and was synonymous with *the prominent position of the elders*, the imported games which have tended to strangle it have no fixed position in traditional society. The elders have either no knowledge of them or no desire to adopt them, no traditional sanctions restrict their manufacture or use, and they are either very simple to make or can be acquired at the local store for money. Moreover, the new games enjoy the doubtful prestige of being imported, modern. *They are a yes to the easy, "civilised" urban life and a no to the traditional rural life seen as backward by the modern generation*. A final point in their favor: they are *detribalised and detribalising games* without roots in any one part of the country and thus devoid of any element of regional or ethnic bias. *Mankala* on these counts appears at first sight to be *out of tune with modern, "developing" Africa*. The mere fact that chance is an important ingredient in many new games may express and soothe the frustration felt in the new society in the face of loss of direct participation in government and of *the increased impersonalisation of European-style bureaucracy*.[43]

What is of importance for us is that games, being evaluated both by players and non-players as an "innocent" and purposeless activity (that is, having only one purpose, the recreation of the players) can be used as first rank agents of cultural change, as well as promoters of political ideologies, social norms, or religious and other doctrines.

In this latter case, they play an important role in what the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has coined as "cultural reproduction", in other words in a sociocultural function in which societies, education systems in particular, impregnate the new generations with constitutive principles of the previous ones. Think for example of games which are supposed to simulate life, as *The Checkered Game of Life*. In fact, as we have seen, such games introduce the player to sociocultural values as the basis of virtuous living that leads to success and happiness. Or think of games promoting, one way or another, stereotypes related to the gendered identity of women, from the medieval

game-text *Ragemon le Bon* to the presentation of women in modern digital games[44]. Even "innocent" games not directly related to any kind of gender interaction may spread such stereotypes. Consider for example the pictures on two board game packages produced towards the end of the nineteenth century. In the *Hill's Spelling Blocks* (S.L. Hill & Son, 1869) we see a boy teaching a girl, who is seating in a position revealing inferiority. In *The Horseless Carriage Race* (McLoughlin Brothers, 1900) two boys are sitting in a car, while a girl is standing by her bike, watching from afar the male using the new technology. Needless to say, both illustrations spread the stereotype of a superiority of men over women.[45]

Apart from transferring cultural messages from generation to generation, games have functioned and still function as agents and/or arenas of transcultural communication. It is exactly to this communication between players from different cultural backgrounds and identities that we will now turn our focus.

Games and cultural meetings

In the previously mentioned medieval manuscript of the *Book of Games* there is a miniature showing a Christian and a Muslim playing chess. Let us imagine the situation. These two players were most probably familiar with using two different types of pieces. The Christian would be using iconic pieces (i.e. pieces depicting humans and animals) while the Muslim was for sure using aniconic pieces, as his religious culture did not allow the depiction of humans and animals in art. Most probably, they were also used to playing the game differently, as the set of the Christian included a figure not existing in the Muslim one: The queen. And as the rules related to the queen were different (let us imagine that out two players were playing after the introduction of the new rules for the queen in Europe) than the rules related to her Muslim equivalent, the vizier, the two players of the miniature should have to discuss and agree upon the rules they would follow in their game. We may imagine them discussing this cultural difference before deciding to play the game according to one of the cultural traditions. We may also think that such a discussion, particularly between two scholar players, should open a broader exchange of thoughts on more important, or more trivial, cultural differences between the two religious cultures, on the differences and similarities of the two religions, or even on the importance of religion in general.

Textual and visual sources from various periods witness on games putting together people from different places, religions, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and social groups and strata. Apart from putting different cultures in direct contact, games also operated as vehicles transporting cultural elements from one culture to another, from one social group to another, from one nation to another. A comparative study of games may uncover important evidence on contacts and influences not witnessed by other sources. Paul Brewster has claimed

that both anthropologists and ethnologists can benefit from a comparative study of games. He claims further:

> Perhaps one of the greatest of these [benefits] is the evidence often found in games of direct borrowing or of adaptation of games materials of neighbouring peoples. Sometimes these borrowings or adaptations are of fairly recent date; sometimes the internal evidence points to a much earlier period. In either event, theories regarding culture contacts between certain peoples are often materially strengthened by the discovery of non-indigenous elements in the games played by a particular tribe or nationality.[46]

Brewster refers to the anthropologist and the ethnologist, but what he writes is of direct interest for the historian as well. He adds that such borrowings and adaptations may be due to actual movements of people or by contacts between two historical entities. By following the roots of game borrowings and adaptations, a historian may reveal the routes of these movements or contacts.

Consider also the aphorism of the British philologist, Assyriologist and game scholar Irving Finkel: "games spread from culture to culture in a way that has hardly any parallel".[47] Spreading from one culture to another, games function as agents of cultural diffusion.

Three points should be underlined from the very beginning. First, games are flexible in getting adapted into new cultural environments, while at the same time keeping all, or most of, of their constitutive elements unchanged. Second, as Finkel claims is his aphorism mentioned earlier, games are easily transported artefacts and practices and they are related to everyday life; due to that, they can cross geographical and cultural borders very easily. Third, some games introduced to a new cultural environment might have an innovative dimension, not only related to their material dimensions (boards, pieces, cards, package, etc.) but also, if not mainly, to their immaterial side, i.e. their rules, the interaction between the players and the relationship between players and rules. It is exactly the combination of these three features that makes games valuable sources for the study of cultural interaction and diffusion.

Almost all games incorporate cultural elements and values. Think for example of the symbolic and aesthetic value of any game board or deck of cards, the moral value of following the rules and respecting the opponent, or the linguistic value of game-expressions that are being inherited from generation to generation.

Being part of pastimes and recreation and as they can be played by anyone who is aware of their rules, games give the opportunity for meetings across cultural, social, gender, or even linguistic borders. Countless textual and visual sources witness about people with totally different backgrounds playing against each other or as members of the same team. The double aim of winning and at the same time enjoying the game presides very often over any differences that exist outside the "magic circle".

This interaction across borders also functions as an agent of transportation of artefacts, rules, practices and principles related to the games at question from one cultural entity to another. In some cases, this transportation means the diffusion of cultural elements, as for example the capitalist ideas promoted by *Monopoly* or the sexualized women in digital and non-digital games, *Lara Croft* or *Catwoman* being just two drops in the ocean. Approached on the basis of this feature, games may be studied as vehicles of cultural translation and, as such, tools of cultural change.

The task of the historian using games to analyse the past in terms of cultural translation is exactly to examine (a) whether specific games (have) functioned as agents of cultural translation and, in case of a positive answer, (b) the game elements and/or the gameplay mechanisms that realized the translation and (c) if the translation was intentional or not.

Another valuable study question related to games as media of cultural interaction is whether they could be studied in relation to processes of *cultural globalization*. On the basis of a definition of cultural globalization as the stretching of the same or similar cultural activities, trends, perceptions and values around the world, the question may be rephrased as such: have games functioned as media diffusing ideas, theories, practices, attitudes, prejudices or even material artefacts that have been standardized to compose cultural features accepted globally, or at least at a broadly extended international level?

Our digital era, with its globally released, consumed and played games, does not need much argumentation. The discussion of video games as vehicles of globalization is an endless one: popular wargames have been accused for globally promoting violence and militarization, while social and historical games have been accused for promoting the Western culture and way of life (see for example the discussion of Sid Meier's *Civilization* in Chapter 9).

We should not limit the globalising function of games to the digital world. Its analogue dimension is equally important and interesting. Let us for example think of the modern Olympic Games as global promoters of principles as excellence, fair play or respect, independently of race, nationality, gender, or sexual identity. We may also name the global promotion of the Olympic values (Friendship, Respect and Excellence) and the Paralympic values (Determination, Inspiration, Courage and Equality).

In many cases of games as agents of cultural translation or globalization, an important area of diffusion is that of cultural memory. Games incorporate, or are related to, concrete cultural memories which they transport from one cultural group to the next—or to many other groups, in case of internationally widespread games. In the following pages, I will try to elaborate on that.

Games and cultural memory

Cultural memory has been defined by Astrid Erll as "the interplay of present and past in sociocultural contexts".[48] Erll claims that it is an umbrella term often used as synonymous to collective or social memory, a term that has been used to

designate varying types of memory. It includes, she writes, "media, practices, and structures as diverse as myth, monuments, historiography, ritual, conversational remembering, configurations of cultural knowledge, and neuronal networks".[49]

As cultural memory is a concept denoting different things in different environments, how could we identify and approach it in our context? In the following, I am approaching it as the revitalization in the present—I would dare to use the term *representation* in its nominal content—of past cultural and sociocultural elements, as for example principles and values; practices realizing in an optimal way these principles and values; criteria for evaluating ideas, practices and deeds; aesthetic forms; objects of any kind that have been perceived in their times and in the present as having a cultural dimension or value.

Games belong to the first of the transmitters of cultural memory identified by Erll and cited above: both as media and as practices they can articulate the interplay between present and past in cultural terms—as well as in political and social. Let me illustrate the point by referring to the Olympic Games as a set of practices and to a Sami board game as a medium.

The Olympic games first. A number of cultural memory elements come to life every fourth year through and because of the games. I will limit myself to only three examples. First of all, Greece's role and identity as a birthplace for some of the most central cultural values standardized internationally, if not globally, today. Secondly, the cultural memory of truce related to the Olympics in Antiquity, which was incorporated (at least in theory) in the modern games. Thirdly, the memory of the Olympic cultural values and principles mentioned earlier.

There are also cases, where games maintain cultural memories as elements of identity. Let me exemplify by referring to the Sami game *Dablot Prejjesne* (which means simply "board game" or "gameboard"). *Dablot Prejjesne* (or *Dablo,* as it is commonly known) is a strategy board game. Originally it was played by the Sami people in the North Swedish area Frostviken. The game is supposed to reenact the battles between the indigenous Sami people and peasant settlers who were trying to establish themselves in the Sami areas. As such, the game became a medium that keeps the cultural memory and identity of the Sami people alive.[50]

To the limit of my knowledge, games have not yet been studied as agents of cultural memory, at least to the extend they deserve. In an exceptional study, Jason Begy has reflected on the contribution of board games in the construction of cultural memory through the simulation of cultural metaphors. Studying three railway board games (*1830: Railways and Robber Barons, Age of Steam* and *Empire Builder*), he concluded that

> one medium-specific way games can construct and circulate cultural memory is through the simulation of historically situated structural metaphors. The metaphors a culture uses to understand the world around it become part of their cultural memory and are then reflected in the material objects that culture produces.[51]

Usually, cultural memory is institutionalized in ceremonies and rituals, in cultural materializations as for example sculptures and public buildings and decoration of urban spaces, in textual manifestations and even in pieces of art. Cultural memory related to collective identities "is highly institutionalized and relies on exteriorized, objectified symbolic forms, i.e. on both media and performances of memory, which […] can be transferred into changing contexts and be transmitted from generation to generation".[52] It is often also related to powerful traditions, genuine or invented.[53]

With the exception of public games, as for example the Olympics, the world of games is a totally different arena for the transmission of cultural memory. Here cultural memory is revitalized in an almost unnoticed way every time the player enters the "magic circle" of a game. In their indirect entertaining way, games revitalize, and instruct to, both universal cultural memories (as for example how important is fair play in one's sociocultural context or how crucial is the role chance plays in life) and specific cultural elements related to specific games or their gameplay. There are for example games in which offensive language is excused, while in other games it is totally unaccepted, even if this is not included in the rules of the game—to make the point clear, compare karate to wrestling or *Cards against Humanity* to *Trivial Pursuit*.

In addition, we may thing of national or transnational games, as for example re-enactments of battles and other events from the past. Think for example of re-enactments of the Civil War in the USA or of Viking battles in Scandinavia. Re-enactments of war have existed from at least the Roman period onwards. We know for example that to add interest to the gladiatorial games, the Romans arranged some of the fights as replicas of well-known historical battles.[54] Apart from serving historical memory, re-enactments play an important role in the preservation of cultural memory in various dimensions and areas. To reflect only on re-enactments of battles, both participants and spectators revitalize their memory of material culture and warfare culture, as well as of cultural identity—in most cases related to their national identity.

One of the most prominent and influential theories in memory studies since the 1980s is Pierre Nora's *sites (or realms) of memory* (*lieux de mémoire*).[55] To cite the "official definition" of Pierre Nora, "a *lieu de mémoire* is any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community".[56]

A number of games function as sites of memory: Think of the Olympic Games again. They are supposed to be a global element of cultural heritage. At the same time, the Greeks have the strong belief that the games "belong" to them, as they are related to the Greek past. The roots of the games are still physically related to a site of memory, namely the temple of goddess Hera in Ancient Olympia, where the lighting ceremony of the Olympic flame is performed by a modern "high priestess", who ignites the flame, which will then travel around the world to end up at the Olympic stadium of the hosting country.

Thinking further of physical sites of memory, we may refer to the Colosseum (or any other Roman arena that hosted gladiatorial games). In addition to anything else, the Colosseum is a site of memory of a male military culture in which dignity and prowess were prioritized, public spectacles were important elements of social and political life, and violence and death were perceived as entertainment (see Chapter 7). But the Colosseum functioned as a site of memory during the Roman times as well. As it was built right after the end of the Jewish War and the emperor Vespasian had ordered that it would be built from the spoils of his victory in Judea, the amphitheater was, in addition to anything else, "a monument to the subjection of the Jews".[57]

I would also dare to claim that specific games (or their magic circle) function as sites of memory. *Monopoly* for example could be approached as a site of memory for the western culture after the industrial revolution. Just naming the game (it is not anymore necessary to play it) recalls automatically in mind a culture that is based on monetarism, capitalism, property as a central value related to wealth, the efficient use of resources, the central role of banks in economy, and economic antagonism based on the principle of eliminating your adversaries.[58]

Let me close this section by presenting an idea which is probably going too far, just as a starting point for discussion: I wonder if within the exciting field of historical representation in games (not only digital but also non digital)[59], we could focus specifically on cultural representation, which could and should be studied it in its own right and terms. Such an effort should be based on cultural history approaches and theories related to the following areas of preservation of cultural memory:

a. *Cognitive representation*: This area is related to games as representations of past cultural elements. A number of examples are used in the previous pages, related to both games and gaming as agents or media. I would like to add here one of my favourite games, *Carcassonne* (Klaus-Jürgen Wrede and Hans im Glück, 2000), an area building strategy board game. There is a number of elements that could be named here as agents of cultural memory, from the importance of water to the crucial role of city walls for survival in medieval times, or the central role of knights in medieval society. But I would like to emphasize something more specific: the only medieval institution that is represented clearly in the original version of the game is the monastery, which is represented in a way that underlines the power monasteries had in medieval Europe.
b. *Material preservation*: Here we may think of the material side of games (in Chapter 2). Let me refer once more to re-enactments of past battles and other events. Re-enactors are known for their sensitivity in accuracy, in relation to clothing and the use of weapons and other tools that are exact replicas of the original ones. Apart from getting to know better the material world of the period re-enacted, the players, as well as anyone else who participates in the preparation of the games, get the opportunity to experience and feel the material culture of the past.

c. *Conceptual preservation*: A historian studying this area might focus on the onomasiology of games and metaphors related to them. Of the examples already presented in Chapter 1, I would like to repeat that of the names of chess pieces. The study of the impressively many names of the same pieces in various languages offers a closer understanding of the cultural worlds represented in the conceptual dimension of the game.

Games and cultural hegemony

Could games be studied as tools of social and/or political influence which were used in past societies to either promote and maintain privileges of the relevant elites or to fight against them? To answer this working question, a historian might use various theoretical approaches and starting points. In what follows, I am proposing the lenses of culturalization, cultural hegemony, and cultural resistance.

In game studies, the concept *culturalization* designates one or more changes introduced to a game when it enters a new cultural environment, so that the game will fit into the hosting culture. Kate Edwards divides it into two types: reactive and proactive culturalization. As she writes:

> reactive culturalization involves identifying and removing content elements that might negatively disrupt a user experience; proactive culturalization entails identifying and adding content elements that may enhance the local experience and relevance[60].

Studying the elements of a game that have been, reactively or proactively, culturalized, a historian (as well as an ethnologist, an anthropologist or any other student of culture) identifies the relevant cultural elements that the hosting culture evaluates as so crucial as not to be disturbed by anything, even by the "innocent" games the members of the group play in their pastimes. This might happen at a macro level, when the marketed version of board and card games or the rules of non-material games undergo a process of culturalization, but also at a microlevel, when elements of a game or its rules are changed to fit in. On the macro level, let us think of chess. I may refer to two cases of culturalization. When chess was introduced to Muslim cultural environments, the pieces got an aniconic form, as religion did not allow the depiction of humans and animals in art. Think also of the names of the pieces: the original names revealed the Indian origin of the game, but when chess was adopted in medieval European cultural environments, some of the names (and the form of the relevant pieces) were adapted to reflect the medieval feudal society—this is how and why the horse became a knight (even if many places the piece kept the outlook of a horse) and the elephant was transformed into a bishop. As a micro level example, I could recall something I mentioned a few pages earlier, the erasure by the owner of the space for Suicide in an individual board of the *Checkered Game of Life*.[61] When applied at the macro

level, culturalization changes demonstrate the effort of the hosting culture to maintain its cultural identity intact from external influences.

The culturalization of games is a process that is almost natural and unavoidable. However, it is not just the games that undergo a change in their interaction with new cultural environments. The hosting culture may also experience changes. This happens because, as we have seen, games are agents and transporters of cultural elements. *Mancala* for example has been evaluated by Philip Townshend as "a highly efficient enculturating device, with reference to both moral-intellectual and social values, and as a training mechanism in elementary survival techniques".[62] Townshend speaks mainly of *Mancala* as a tool for cultural teaching from one generation to the next, but this is something that may be applied to many other games and to both a vertical (from generation to generation) and a horizontal (from culture to culture) transmission of cultural elements.

Sometimes, this ability of games is used by social and political elites to promote or strengthen their own power and sociopolitical position. In these cases, games function as a tool of what the early twentieth-century Italian Marxist philosopher and politician Antonio Gramsci has coined as *hegemony*. Gramsci did not define the concept explicitly. The closest we may come to a short definition of this complex political, social and cultural concept is, to quote Sujeong Kim, that

> the concept of hegemony refers to a historical process in which a dominant group exercises "moral and intellectual leadership" throughout society by winning the voluntary "consent" of popular masses.[63]

Gramsci speaks of two superstructures in a society, what he calls "civil society" on one hand and "political society" and "the State" on the other. He also claims that the interaction between the two is realized in the "direct domination" of the state and the "hegemony" of the political society over the civil society. This means that the ruling elite does not rule only by using power (domination) but also by convincing the civil society that the existing political, social and economic structures and cultures are the best possible alternative for the specific society (hegemony). This is a continuing process in which the civil society learns and relearns to see life through the eyes of the elite and accept the elite's values as non-negotiable.[64]

Even if Gramsci did not coin his theory as "cultural" but simply as "hegemony", his thesis came to be known as "cultural hegemony". Independently of their political and economic Marxist roots and background, Gramsci's theory might be used in a variety of cases, areas and periods. This also includes the world of games.[65]

Let me illustrate the point by referring to the game *Cards Against Humanity*. This is a game promoted by its producer (Cards Against Humanity LLC, 2011), as "a party game for horrible people" which "unlike most of the party games you've played before […] is as despicable and awkward as you and your friends".[66] This card game is also known, and promoted, as a politically incorrect game (by

the way, this is exactly the name of its Norwegian version, *Politisk Ukorrekt*). But to define what is politically *incorrect*, one has first to define what is politically *correct*. Who is to define that? And which are the criteria to be used? If, for example, it is politically incorrect to joke against a religious figure, what does this mean for an atheist playing the game? And what is actually "despicable" and "awkward"? In Norway, the release of the game (by Vennerød forlag) in 2017 was followed by reactions that resulted in some selling stores withdrawing the game, which created a debate on speech freedom.[67]

Such games, defining, directly or not, what is acceptable and what is not, or what is right and what is wrong, have existed for centuries. And they have been used by the mighty to indoctrinate the majority on the values, or the "values", of the social or the political system behind the games. Such a use of games may be analysed through the theory of cultural hegemony.

Games might be used as agents of cultural hegemony in various ways. Sometimes hegemony is communicated through the power of symbols included in games. Let us think for example of an eighteenth-century board game that has existed in two versions, as *Sun and Anchor* and *Crown and Anchor*. The only difference between the two versions is that one of them is politically neutral while the other is based on the most recognizable symbol of monarchy.[68] All games based on royal and/or noble figures, as for example the normal 52-cards games or chess, might also be considered as games promoting cultural hegemony. In other cases, the rules of a game might underline the extra power possessed by specific institutions, groups or individuals—here, as well, the example of chess comes automatically in mind. Games might also promote specific practices, principles and values related to the interests of the ruling elite. Games promoting capitalistic values, as for example *Monopoly*, could be better understood this way.

Contemporary digital games addressing, at least theoretically, the whole world, could promote cultural structures or even superstructures. Think for example of the digital game *Civilization*, which has been criticized for promoting globally the political system and culture of the USA. In a very critical article having the powerful subtitle "The bio-cultural imperialism of Sid Meier's Civilization", Kacper Pobłocki argues that "by playing Civilization we enable the American state to come to itself, and what is more: we ourselves become that state". Furthermore, *Civilization* promotes Western culture and the excessive use of technology as the only alternatives towards development and finally success.[69] It is difficult avoiding the thought that *Civilization* is not the only game serving similar purposes, related not only to the USA but to other international powers as well.

Cultural hegemony exists outside politics as well; gender hegemony is a powerful example. Gender hegemony has been dominating for millennia. And one of the areas in which it has been very active, implicitly and explicitly and unfortunately until our days, is the world of games. Recall the examples of patriarchal stereotypes mentioned earlier (how girls and boys are depicted in *Hill's Spelling Blocks* and *The Horseless Carriage Race*) and add countless examples of sexualizing women in both digital and non-digital games. But gender hegemony is not

limited to the male/female dichotomy. Recently, queer game studies have also challenged "a variety of dichotomies that have long structured how scholars and designers alike understand games".[70]

The concept of hegemony is related by Gramsci to that of domination. The main difference between them is that domination is based on the execution of various types of coercion by the mighty on the dominated groups, while hegemony is based on the voluntary consent of the dominated. Games could also be studied historically in relation to domination, in fact as arenas where domination is executed by political, social, economic and/or cultural elites. Think for example of the exclusion of women from the majority of games in most historical periods and all around the world (I will come back to that phenomenon in Chapter 4), the exclusion of cultural and social groups from physical games and game competitions (as for example the Olympic Games), or the absence or marginalization of cultural and specific social groups in the content of board games, quizzes and other games. Let us also recall that in various past societies, playing specific games or spending time in gaming was evaluated as inappropriate for the cultured members of the society—you may think of dice, card games, or even playing football as characteristic examples. I would dare to say that in the globalized period of human history the design of most games has been an arena of racial, gender, social and cultural discrimination.

The execution of cultural hegemony and the exclusion of various social and cultural groups from games could not but create reactions, which in some cases reached the level of *cultural resistance*. The study of these reactions could be another important subject for a historian. Typical examples of game cultural resistance could be the act of playing, or even watching, "prohibited" games, something that might apply mainly to sports but it is also relevant to other types of games.[71] Another way of resistance could be changing the rules or the content of games or even hide messages of resistance in the content of a game.

Let me illustrate the point by using an example related to a board game. Philip Townshend presents the case of a group of youth in the area of Nuda in southern Sudan who made a cement board of *Mancala*, which was different than the traditional one used in the area (it had four instead of two rows of six holes). As the four-rows game belongs to another Sudanese culture, that of the Shilluk people, the Nuda elders reacted by destroying the cement board, perceiving it as a threat to their authority and their ethnic identity. Townshend points to the fact that the youth indeed had the aim of escaping the cultural control of the elders. Even if their effort was not successful, it illustrates vividly how games may be the arenas of cultural domination, hegemony and resistance.[72]

★★★

Games might be used in various ways as sources of both cultural history and the history of culture(s). They might also be studied on the basis of various theoretical approaches and methodological strategies. Their study reveals not only specific cultural elements but also trends of cultural developments and interactions.

In many cases, such a study of games might enter the fields of social structures and interaction, social stratification or social discrimination. This is exactly what I will turn my focus on in the following chapter.

NOTES

1 Pliny 1969: 516–517.
2 The relation between games and culture in scholarship has been recently resulted in the establishment of a journal dedicated to the subject, *Games and Culture*, focusing mainly on digital games. See Steinkuehler 2006 and the self-identification of the journal at their webpage: https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/journal/games-and-culture#description.
3 As *culture* is as essentially contested concept, I would like to make clear that my approach is based on an understanding of culture as a *way of thinking and acting* that is expressed in the works of individuals or collective entities. This means that a historian's focus should be placed on how these *ways of thinking and acting* play a decisive role in our individual or collective historical agency, be it intellectual (understanding, identifying, defining, reflecting, analysing, evaluating) or practical (social interaction, political involvement, economic behaviour, any kind of production etcetera). On the plurality of meanings and definitions of culture see, among others, Spencer-Oatey 2012; Sewell 2005: 152–174.
4 See for example De Voogt, Dunn-Vaturi & Eerkens 2013 and De Voogt 2018 who study games in Africa in relation to cultural transmission and relevant theoretical approaches, or Malaby 1999, who uses gambling in the Greek island of Crete as a starting point to discuss everyday encounters with chance and the unpredictable.
5 Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 507.
6 Huizinga 1949: 46.
7 Caillois 2001: 58.
8 Caillois 2001: 82.
9 T. R. Radmanabhachari, "Games, Sports and Pastimes in Prehistoric India", *Man in India*, XXI, 2–3 (1941) 128; cited in Brewster 2005/1971a: 11.
10 Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 516.
11 Caillois 2001: 83.
12 Caillois 2001: 85.
13 Avedon & Sutton-Smith 2015/1971: 3–4.
14 See Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 97.
15 On *Mancala* and its rules see Russ 2007; Townshend 2007; Parlett 1999: 207–223; De Voogt 1997; Russ 1984; and Townshend 1979.
16 De Voogt 1997: 14–15.
17 Townshend 1979: 795.
18 Townshend 1979: 796; see below.
19 Van Binsbergen 1997: 238.
20 See Seville 2016b.
21 See the list of wonders in Seville 2016d: 109.
22 Shevtsov 2016: 376.
23 Elias & Dunning 1986: 21.
24 For an overview see Crowther 2007.
25 Purcell 1995: 13, referring to Tacitus, *Germania*: 24.
26 Van Creveld 2013: 321.
27 Caillois 2001: 66.
28 Caillois 2001: 67.
29 See Caillois 2001: 11–36 and Rogers 1982.

30 See Musser Golladay 2005. The *fil*, or *alfil* or *elephant*, was an old piece that moved two spaces diagonally; it was later replaced by the bishop. On Alfonso X see Martínez 2010. On his *Libro de los juegos* see Musser Golladay 2007; Musser Golladay 2005; Serrano 2017.
31 On the popularity of digital RPGs in modern times, see Horsfall & Oikonomou 2011.
32 On the *Checkered Game of Life* see Whitehill 1999: 123 and Freeman-Witthort 2007: 272.
33 Rovee 2015; see also Seville 2016d: 137–140. Parlett 1999: 100 also presents *The Game of Human Life* (1790) as the direct ancestor of Milton Bradley's game. The game had its origin in other *Game-of-the-Goose*-type games that had been published in continental Europe, naming *Le Nouveau Jeu de La Vie Humaine,* a game published in Paris in 1779 by Jean-Baptiste Crépy.
34 For such a comparison between the 1779-Paris and the 1790-London games see Rovee 2015.
35 On *The Mansion of Happiness* see Whitehill 1999: 119–122; Seville 2016d: 140–143 and Freeman-Witthort 2007: 272.
36 On the didactic use of *Snakes & Ladders* see below, chapter 6.
37 See for example Kanin 1981 and O'Mahony 2012: 81–121.
38 Piccione 2007: 57.
39 See Gardeła 2012: 239–243.
40 Mackenzie 2004: 120. *Liubo* was a race-and-displacement board game that was very popular in China from the middle of the fourth century BC to the end of the second century AD (on the game see Mackenzie 2004).
41 See for example Nielsen 2014; Kyle 2014: 23–26; Kanin 1981: 10–12.
42 See for example Giatsis 2000; Roueché 2008: 681.
43 Townshend 1979: 796; my emphasis.
44 On gender stereotypes in *Ragemon le Bon*, see Patterson 2015b. On gender stereotypes in modern digital games, see, among others, Cassell & Jenkins 1998; Kafai et al. 2008; Norris 2004.
45 You may find the pictures in Hofer 2003: 56 (*Hill's Spelling Blocks*) and 154 (*The Horseless Carriage Race*). A study of the pictures used in the packages of board games may reveal plenty of evidence on cultural features of a given society and period, particularly on conceptions related to gender; I hope that such projects will be undertaken by historians and game scholars soon.
46 Brewster 2005/1971a: 12–13.
47 Finkel 2007a: 1.
48 Erll 2008: 2. On cultural memory see also Neumann & Zierold 2012; Erll 2011; Nünning & Erll 2010; Erll, Nünning & Young 2008 (all with further bibliography).
49 Erll 2008: 1.
50 See Botermans 2007: 655 and Murray 1951: 63–64 (*Tablut*).
51 Begy 2017: 735. The metaphors he relates to the games are the annihilation of time and space, the creation of space, and the loss of aura.
52 Neumann & Zierold 2012: 236, referring to Assmann 1992.
53 On invented traditions see Hobsbawm 2012.
54 Van Creveld 2013: 60.
55 See Nora & Kritzman 1996–1998; for introductions to and discussions of the theory, see Erll 2011: 13–37; Den Boer 2008.
56 Nora & Kritzman 1996: xvii.
57 MacLean 2014: 585.
58 *Monopoly* is now produced and owned by Hasbro. Originally, it was published in 1935 by Parker Brothers. On the history of *Monopoly*, Lizzie Magie's original *Landlord's game* and the Anti-Monopoly game designed by Ralph Anspach, professor of Economics at San Francisco State University, see Whitehill 1999: 131–133; Pilon

2015; Anspach 1998; Freeman-Witthort 2007: 272–273. Philip Winkelman identified a native American antecedent of the *Landlord's Game*, namely the game *Zohn Ahl*, played by the Kiowa Indians of Oklahoma in the nineteenth century (see Winkelman 2016: 23–30).

59 Historical representation has been related mainly, if not exclusively, to digital games. Among the countless relevant publications, see for example Chapman 2016; Kapell & Elliott 2013; Fogu 2009; Peterson, Miller & Fedorko 2013; Fogu 2009; Thorsen 2012.

60 Edwards 2016: 98. Edwards refers to digital games, but her theory could be used for non-digital games as well. A specific form of game culturalization is what she calls "localization", a process of "adapting game content for a special geographical locale". The main difference between the two is that "culturalization goes beyond localization by taking a deeper look into a game's fundamental assumptions and content choices and then assessing their viability both in the broad, multicultural marketplace as well as in specific geographic locales" (Edwards 2016: 97). For a case of localization of board games in Micronesia see De Voogt 2018; for the culturalization of the Roman board games see Hall & Forsyth 2011.

61 Whitehill c2010.

62 Townshend 1979: 796.

63 Kim 2015: 743.

64 Gramsci 1971: 5–25; see also Jones 2006: 41–79 and Lears 1985.

65 For a discussion of the implementation of Gramsci's hegemony in digital games, see Cassar 2013.

66 See https://cardsagainsthumanity.com, last visited 28 April 2020.

67 See for example Kalstad & Anstensrud Schibevaag 2017 and Winnem 2017 (both in Norwegian).

68 See Botermans 2007: 435–436.

69 See Pobłocki 2002, here 172. I will discuss *Civilization* and Pobłocki's criticism below, in chapter 9.

70 Ruberg & Shaw 2017: ix.

71 For two cases related to sports see Carrington 2002 and Forsyth & Wamsley 2006.

72 See Townshend 2007: 247.

4

GAMES OF SOCIETY

I grew up in Mystegna, a small village on the island of Lesbos in Greece. When I was twelve years old, we were playing football and what we called "war" (sometimes simply pretending we had guns and sometimes throwing at each other whatever we had available, including stones; when we didn't have a ball, we also used stones to play football). Girls would never play neither football nor war. My children grew up in Norway. When my daughter was twelve years old, just over a decade ago, she could play both football and war games with anyone she wanted—thankfully without stones. When my son was twelve, a couple of years ago, he played both football and war with people who probably have never kicked a ball or thrown a stone in their lives. He played online, and sometimes in his war games, he used female figures as avatars.

The world of games has historically been like mine, not like my children's: Strongly gendered, stereotyped and in most cases unwelcoming to female players. Let me give a century-old example: In 1913, H. G. Wells published a book of rules for playing war games, whose title was *Little Wars: a game for boys from twelve years of age to one hundred and fifty and for that more intelligent sort of girl who likes boys' games and books*. The only comments I need to make is that this way of thinking about female gaming was not exceptional.

This chapter studies games as historical sources of social and everyday life, social integration and social stratification. It is not so often we think of games as arenas of social interactions and even social stratification and discrimination. But they are. Who plays what, who plays (and does not play) with whom, when and where people play what, or the use of games to serve social goals (as for example education) constitute valuable historical evidence.

Gender stereotypes, mainly female but also male, is the subject of the last section of this chapter. The sections prior to that study games as social worlds,

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agents of socialization, witnesses of equality and inequality, as well as arenas of social discrimination and mobility.

This is not the right place to discuss the importance of games in social sciences. What we may underline, though, is that the intensive study of games by sociologists proves their importance in the study of social life. There are scholars, as for example Gary Alan Fine, who believe that "the sociality of games is fundamental"[1]. Their value as sources of social history lies in the fact that games have always had a direct or indirect social role and dimension. This dimension has not only been related to the traditional "vertical" division of societies in more and less privileged strata (what in the recent centuries has been called classes) but also to the "horizontal" social division in terms of citizenship, religion, cultural identity, race and gender.[2]

The main social function of games is of course that of recreation. This has been the case from times immemorial. But games are not only important for the student of social structures and development also for their re-creative character. In addition to being central as pastimes, games have also answered to other social needs, their use as educational or training tools being the most characteristic example.

The sociocultural study of games focuses very often on the relationship and interaction between the worlds of games, what is by many scholars coined as the "magic circle" of a game, and the surrounding social and cultural environment, what we, in lack of a better term, call "real life". Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman write:

> Games throughout history and across the world have subverted norms of social behavior. […] Inside the artificial context of the magic circle, games not only create meaning, but they play with meaning as well. The social contract of a game ensures that play spaces are "safe" spaces in which risks have fewer consequences than in the outside world.[3]

Often, the borders between games and social life become indistinguishable and, according to Roger Caillois, the line dividing games and their ideal rules from the laws of daily life gets blurred and the game might become an obsession, an activity of passion and compulsion and a source of anxiety.[4] Examples as obsession with gambling or spending countless hours playing digital games may illustrate the point. This is not a modern phenomenon. As seen in other parts of this book, historical sources, as for example antigaming legislation, witness on examples when gaming was transformed into social dysfunction.

The social function of games has varying serious dimensions. Having studied sociocultural interactions in a Greek local society, for example, Thomas Malaby speaks about the social and cultural consequences of games. He claims that even in casual nongambling backgammon matches, "status and relationships are on the table in place of hard currency".[5]

But why is all this important for the historian? Why should s/he pay attention to games when studying any given past society? Roger Caillois gives an answer,

writing that the relationship between a society and the games it likes to play is reciprocal. He also speaks of an "increasing affinity" between the members of the society and their characteristics on one side and the rules of the games they play on the other. The most popular games play a double role: first, they reflect "the tendencies, tastes, and ways of thought that are prevalent", and second, they educate and train the players in virtues, habits and preferences.[6]

Apart from studies on the individuals that were enchanted by games to a troublesome level, the study of cases of obsession may answer questions related to the acceptable forms of using time, of what kind of games were attractive enough to create collective obsessions, and what kind of social rules were implemented to face the challenge. Furthermore, games have played in various periods and societies a very important role in the process of socialization, an area we will focus on in the following section.

Games might function as sources for the study of past societies in different areas and at varying levels. Some of them are presented in the following pages. What I would like to underline here is that games fit very well the study of micro-history. As its title reveals, micro-history, which is often related to social anthropology, abandons the study of large historical entities and/or large historical periods to focus on the small scale, in other words on local societies, small periods of time, concrete social activities, or even individuals.[7] One of the classic examples of micro-history is the (originally anthropological) study of cockfighting in Bali by Clifford Geertz.[8] In this study, Geertz focuses on a specific activity of the Balinese society, namely cockfighting and the gambling related to it, and he uses this "microscopic example", as he calls it, to understand the whole Balinese culture and its social manifestations. The world of games could be understood as a laboratory for micro-history. By focusing on specific games, on objects or buildings related to games, on specific sides or dimensions of games, on laws related to gaming and gambling, on outstanding players, and many other game aspects, a historian might understand better the society that designed, produced and/or played the relevant game(s).

As I mentioned before, this chapter is dedicated to games as sources for the study of social and everyday life, social integration and social stratification. It focuses on socialization, equality and inequality, inclusion and exclusion and gender stereotypes. Before considering games as sources of social history at mezzo and macro level, I would like to present briefly a social function of games at micro-level: often, games are the core of social communities of players sharing the same passion for a game and having their own rules, their own memories, their own codes of communication and their own traditions. These communities are coined as "soft communities", "social worlds" or "game subcultures".

In his book *Players and Pawns: How Chess Builds Community and Culture*, the American sociologist Gary Alan Fine approaches chess from a social perspective. After having studied amateur and professional chess communities, he argues that "chess as a shared action space—as a leisure world—is eternally social, building

on group ties."[9] These group ties are so strong that he uses chess to speak about the creation of what he calls "soft communities", i.e. communities consisting of people, both amateurs and professionals, who share the same passion for a game and share an element of common identity even if they have nothing else in common and they never contact each other outside the game world. He also claims that this is a more general phenomenon, related to leisure worlds, which "invariably develop community and culture"[10], something that applies to all game activities. According to Johan Huizinga, this is a central feature of play in general.[11]

Which are, then, the main features of "social worlds" created by and around games? In his study of chess, Gary Alan Fine tries to analyse the game as a system of activity, what he calls "a social world with history, rules, practices, emotions, status, power, organization, and boundaries". He explains that by "social world" he refers to "a community that is meaningful for its participants, that provides a social order, and that permits a sense of self and a public identity."[12]

It is also possible that game communities develop their own subcultures. The Finnish game scholar Frans Mäyrä, approaching games from a cultural perspective speaks about game subcultures that have their own characteristics and common features. By doing so, he presents the cultural background of what Fine coins as "soft communities". Mäyrä writes that game subcultures: (a) share the same *language*, based on the terminology of the game they play together; (b) have common *rituals* related to the game; (c) they are often interested in *artefacts* related to the game (he uses original packaged games, gaming devices, books, posters and such paraphernalia as examples); (d) they have a common interest in the same *memorabilia* that are physical expressions of the significance of the game for the members of the subculture; and (e) they have their own identifiable *shared spaces* (he speaks of websites or online discussion boards, but this could also apply to physical spaces—game clubs are a good example of that).[13]

The theory of soft communities may be used as a theoretical lens to consider games in general. Indeed, there are many games that consist the epicentre of such communities. For the historian, the "soft communities" or "social worlds" of games may be very interesting subjects of micro-history. Given that they interact, directly or not, with the local, national, or international socio-cultural systems they belong to, these communities/worlds offer the historian alternative starting points for the study of the development of these systems, in terms of social and cultural features.

This is just a small part of the social function of games. Now it is time to take into consideration the broad picture and consider games as agents and witnesses of social structuring and interaction, in positive and negative terms. It is logical, I think, to open this study by discussing the function of games in processes of socialization. Before doing so, I would like to refer to a model that might be useful in the social study of games. In a social study of extensive digital gaming and extensive watching of online porn, Philip Zimbardo and Nikita Coulombe offer a tripartite theoretical model on how to study these two phenomena. I believe

that this model might be used by historians as well, in relation to the study of the sociocultural function of games in any period. They write:

> Whenever we want to understand and explain complex human behaviour, it is essential to resort to a three-part analysis: first, what the *individual* brings into the behavioural context—his or her dispositional traits; next, what the *situation* brings out of the person who is behaving in a particular social or physical setting; and finally, how the underlying *system* of power creates, maintains or modifies those situations.[14]

For the historian, the most important points of focus are the ones coined by the two authors as "the situation" and "the system", where the situation might be the specific gaming circumstances and the system might be the sociocultural environment, in which the game is played.

Games and socialization

Socialization has two slightly different meanings: it means learning how to behave in a way accepted by the society you belong to, and it also means mixing socially with others. Games have historically served both these social processes, directly and indirectly—in some cases, this is true even for individual games, as most individuals playing a game either follow rules and attitudes that are socially composed or imagine themselves as playing within the framework of a smaller or larger social group.

There are games that are tools of socialization by definition. In our digital gaming era, you might easily think of games as for example *SimCity* (Electronic Arts, 1989), *The Sims* (Electronic Arts, 2000), or *Second Life* (Linden Lab, 2003), which are designed as virtual societies, in which the player gets the possibility of realizing another version of her/himself through an avatar.

In other games, both digital and analogue, the player practices, sometimes unconsciously, specific social roles and plays out social activities expressing social values and principles. In some of them, the player is in fact asked to reveal elements of her/his own social identity or profile as a part of the game. Think for example of many parlour games, in which the players are asked to speak about themselves.

I would dare to say that most games introduce, directly or not, the player into the world of social rules and conventions. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman have noted that in many cases playing a game "implies a kind of social contract" which "consists of rules that determine how players interact with each other in the game, as well as the meanings and values that the players give life through play".[15] For children, following the rules of this "contract" is an introduction to the importance of rules in their function in any social interaction. For adults, it is a constant reminder. In other words, games prepare the player to follow social rules and they remind her/him of the importance of following them.[16]

Another important social function of games is related to winning and losing, as well as how both winners and losers administer the result of a game. Speaking about the socializing function of games, it might be claimed that this is one of their most important socializing elements. Principles learned and experience accommodated in administering victories and defeats in the game world may prove very valuable in administering both positive and negative outcomes in crucial social activities, as for example in professional life. What makes this point of particular interest is that, quite often, individual victories and defeats are related to the group a player belongs to.

Finally, games might function as "passports" introducing newcomers to social circles and even making them equal members. The anthropologist Thomas Malaby has spent some time in Greece studying gambling and its social dimension. One of the things he notes is how playing backgammon, and eventually winning some games, got him accepted by the locals:

> Being a foreigner in Greece, I was often challenged to games of backgammon, prowess at which, as throughout the region, is closely associated with national identity and pride. Once I became able to do more than hold my own at the game, and in fact to win steadily from time to time, the potential meaning of the outcomes broadened, reflecting any of a number of new possibilities (e.g., "You've become Greek, now!" or "The clever American must have found a new way to cheat"). […] As games themselves show most powerfully, the shared engagement of contingency is a powerful means for the development of trust and belonging.[17]

At the same time, the world of games functions as a mirror reflecting social structures and interactions, as well as sociocultural values and principles. This is exactly what makes games a valuable source for social history.

Games as social mirrors

In 1883, Mc Loughlin Brothers published the board game *Monopolist*. Unfortunately, I could not get access to the rules of the game. But even the only evidence on the game I could find, a picture of the board and a small part of the advertisement included in the commercial catalogue of the company, are so interesting pieces of historical evidence, that I cannot resist the temptation of referring to the game as a source of social history.

The advertisement presents the game as a "great struggle between Capital and Labor" that "can be fought out to the satisfaction of all parties, and, if the players are successful, they can break the Monopolist and become Monopolists themselves".[18] This means that the producers of the *Monopolist* saw the game as a medium of social (and of course political) communication. Not being aware of its rules, I will simply focus on the board as a communicative tool.

The board is rectangular, and the gaming area consists of six concentric circles. The inner circle is divided vertically into two semicircles, each divided into four parts numbered from one to four. The outer three circles are divided into a varying number of spaces. All spaces of the two external ones are decorated with various symbols related to economic activities. The third has empty squares except two, one with a symbol of the American state and the other depicting a spider with its net. The circles with the direct communicative function are the second and the third from the centre. Both are divided into four parts. The parts of the second have the titles (from top and clockwise) Bankruptcy, Dishonor, Ruin and Failure. The relevant parts of the third circle bear the titles Embarrassment, Loss of Credit, Unlucky Venture and Impaired Capital. Bankruptcy is thus visually related to embarrassment, dishonour to the loss of credit, ruin to unlucky venture and failure to impaired capital.

Another piece of social historical element is included in the corners of the board, which are dedicated to four social groups. Starting from the top left corner and moving her/his eyes clockwise, the player could see the merchant, the mechanic, the farmer, and the scientist. The merchant is depicted in a harbour dock, in front of a boat that gets loaded with barrels and boxes by three harbour workers. The mechanic shows three men working in a smithery, while the farmer is depicted as a man plowing. In the fourth corner, the concept scientist is illustrated as two men working together in a study.

In terms of social history and socialization in particular, you might think that the board reflects a male dominated society (no woman is depicted on the board), which saw farming, engineering, trade and science as the pillars of economic prosperity and focused on capital impairment, credit protection and taking risks as economic activities of crucial importance.

A historian studying the structure and the stratification of a given society and their development in time could get useful insight by focusing on the study of games and gaming. Various study questions could function as starting points, as for example: Is the social stratification reflected in the rules of a game, or the traditions related to it, as to who is permitted to play and under which premises? Or, do the rules of a game, or its practice, introduce elements promoting or challenging the existing stratification?

Our imaginary historian might also study cases, in which games reflect the professional life of a society. A typical example for this is a family of Chinese games that is known as "promotion games".[19] Promotion games, which existed from at least the end of the first millennium AD, were board games accompanied by a book of rules for (all or most of) the positions in Chinese bureaucracy. Chinese bureaucracy was unique in that admission was based on passing a specific exam and promotion was based on administrative ability. Promotion games had exactly the aim of introducing the players to the principles related to the public service. Chinese promotion games witness on four things. First, they record a map of Chinese bureaucracy, as the rules name the relevant positions

and give a clear picture of their hierarchical arrangement. Second, the rules also witness on issues resulting in the promotion or demotion of a public servant. Third, they show how important it was for any citizen to enter the Chinese bureaucracy and improve in it. Fourth, the fact that they were played with dice reflects the belief that promotion in the civil service (as life in general) could also be a matter of chance.

The study of games might also indirectly reveal principles, hopes and fears of the social entity playing them. Let us for example consider the medieval game-text *Ragemon le Bon*. This was a typical game, where two or more players chose cards with short texts revealing something about their future and they had to commend on the content of the cards. Such games were used in various periods as media for social contact, often with flirting content. The Canadian medievalist and game scholar Serina Patterson, who studied *Ragemon le Bon*, claims that even if it is not to be considered as a witness of actual courtly or social behavior, it is an indirect but worthy witness on medieval attitudes and spaces afforded for play and courtly flirting interaction.[20] Indeed, by studying the texts, we get a picture of what was perceived as coveted or not, prioritized or not, evaluated highly or not. In Patterson's words:

> Good fortunes typically depict riches, favorable character traits, success in love, courtly behavior, eloquence, and fame, while misfortunes highlight the player's fickleness, folly, gluttony, danger, pain, or other foibles.[21]

In other cases, the content of the cards indirectly reveals social and sociocultural conceptions. Let us for example consider a fortune that "reveals" the following future for the player: "Drunkenness and gluttony, jealousy and lechery: these four sins are seated and firmly fixed in your twisted heart".[22] The first element a historian may register on the basis of this text is four sins that were considered as significant among the gentry in the specific place and period. But the text is also a witness of a cultural conception of the heart as an instrument of central importance for the personality of the individual and his/her social realization.[23]

In some instances, games may reflect, or even ritualize, social conflicts, as for example in the case of football.[24] These conflicts are not always limited to the "magic circle" of the game. Local derbies for example could escalate to street fights between the supporters of the opposite teams, or even to killings. Moreover, the unhappiness of losing an important game may be transformed to aggressiveness and violence, verbal or physical.

Games and gaming might also illustrate social and socio-political hierarchies. *Mancala* for example has been in several African societies related to adult male social prestige. As Philip Townshend has noted, for a child or a woman to beat a man in a public game or just to participate in, or be present at, the ridiculing of the loser in an all-male game would have been a source of most hurtful shame and damaging to the political power enjoyed by men.[25]

Another interesting study question is related to the occasions for playing. There are games that are usually performed in relation to specific social occasions. Which are these occasions? What is their importance for the society? Why are they related to the performance of games? And which are the criteria used to choose the games that will be played in relation to these occasions? And what does the symbolism related to these games reveal? Let us, by way of example, think of playing *Mancala* in African societies. In some parts of Africa, playing *Mancala* was associated to funerals, marriages and other occasions, as for instance a girl's first menstrual period. This interaction between everyday life and gameplay is sometimes reflected in the terminology used in the game, when for example the game pieces and movements are named after the relevant humans, animals, objects or the relevant social activities.[26]

In various periods, the historian faces a dual social evaluation of games. On one hand s/he faces negative evaluations and prohibitions by the rulers and on the other very positive evaluations by the society, mainly its higher strata. Speaking about the medieval times for example, Robert Bubczyk writes that "examples of rulers' critical attitudes towards chess, tables, and dice did not […] reflect the general tendency among representatives of medieval social élites to regard games as a significant means of education and leisure."[27]

The evaluation of games and gaming usually varies in relation to the social background of the evaluator(s). The same applies to the gaming activities as well. The world of games reflected in many periods the social structure, from which some games were also heavily influenced. This reflection of social structure and stratification is the subject of the following pages.

Games as agents of equality and inequality

You probably remember that one of the favourite gaming activities in the small village I grew up was football. I guess I do not need to argue much to convince you that those few boys who owned a ball were among the most popular in the village. This meant two things: That our football society was divided between those few who owned a ball and the majority who did not. For us, those who could afford having a ball were wealthy. And getting a ball as a birthday or Christmas present was something much more than a present: It was an improvement of your social status among the other boys. At the same time, our small village society knew which boys were the most skilled in football. And given that (a) football had a very special significance and (b) every now and then the village team had to play against the teams of the neighbouring villages (in games than more often than not ended with fights between both players and spectators), the most skilled players enjoyed a special esteem as representatives of the village.

I am confident that you can also refer to relevant experiences you have had in your adolescent or adult life. And this is not a modern phenomenon. Games and gaming have been related to social stratification in various periods. Game students are familiar with terms as for example royal, aristocratic, popular and folksy

games. In various societies, members of the upper strata have used games and gaming to distinct themselves from the rest of the population. In other cases, the opposite has occurred, namely making games and gaming arenas for expressing the distinction from, or the opposition to, the high or ruling stratum (or strata). In still other cases, members of specific strata tried to get a glimpse of higher or lower parts of the society by participating in gaming activities that were related to this or that "other" stratum. The comparison of games of chance to games of strategy is a characteristic example. In many periods, games of chance were evaluated as recreative activities suiting the lower strata of the society[28] while games of strategy were more related to the higher one(s).

As for their main function, games were divided into those that were simply recreative and those that had an educative or instructive dimension. The example of chess illustrates clearly the point. Speaking about eighteenth-century Germany, Elliott Avedon and Brian Sutton-Smith have noted that "it was a common belief among the upper classes that chess, in addition to being recreative, offered training in mental and moral discipline".[29] This is a belief that is also registered in other periods and places. A comparison of chess to other games may make the point clearer. In *The Governor* by Thomas Elyot, published in 1531, we see that dice games are expelled because of their relation to gambling, while card games and backgammon are approved as pastimes, and chess is appreciated as a mental stimulation.[30]

A very interesting observation in the historical study of games in social terms is that games do not only reflect social structure and stratification, but they were also used as agents both dividing and unifying different strata of the same societies. Indeed, games could be approached as agents of both inequality and equality.

Let me start by referring to equality. Games, games of chance in particular, play (or at least can play) another social role. They offer to weak members of the society the possibility to excel something that is not always possible in real life and even in games of skill and/or strategy. In various periods and societies, kings and slaves could play (at least in theory) on equal terms, having the same roles in the game and the same winning odds. I cannot think of any other social activity, where a slave has the right to come out on top of his/her master. Unfortunately, when the game was corrupted (which most probably was usually the case), the inequality of real life invaded the game world (for example by suppressing the performance of the socially weaker player, who could be much stronger within the "magic circle" of the game), changing, most of the times, the result of the game.

On the other hand, games consisted an arena of inequality. To start with the material dimension of games, even the possibility to own a game set, especially the ownership of luxury sets and equipment, was (and still is) a marker of inequality. Consider for example the case of African societies, in which ownership of portable sets of *Mancala* was either communal or restricted to local rulers or members of the highest stratum of the society. As in so many similar cases, the material of the board and the playing pieces, their production quality and their decoration reflected the social status of the owner.[31]

But the world of games might establish inequality in immaterial terms as well. Focusing on the result of the games and relating games to ritual, the French anthropologist and ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss has stressed that games have the ability of establishing differences that do not exist before the game starts:

> Games […] appear to have a *disjunctive* effect: they end in the establishment of a difference between individual players or teams where originally there was no indication of inequality. And at the end of the game they are distinguished into winners and losers.[32]

This dimension of the game world might prove very difficult for some of the members of the social entities at question, particularly those who are marked as losers or incapable to play a specific game that is appreciated by the relevant society or social group. But there are more ways in which games create or promote inequality.

A specific type of inequality related to games is the religious one. Most games may be played, of course, by members of all religions. But there have been cases, when gaming became an arena for the demonstration of social inequality based on religious ground. Let me exemplify by using a medieval source. A document from the city of Tudela in Spain, dated in 1368, shows that "the gaming house for the Jews and the Moors of the city must have been distinct from the one frequented by Christians".[33]

Games might also witness on politico-cultural discrimination. Let us for example thing of an eighteenth-century game family, the so-called *Games of the Jew*. Most of these games included anti-Semitic connotations and presented the Jews in negative stereotypical terms. An exception to that is *The New Combination Game of the Jew*, published in Paris in 1784 by Jean-Baptiste Crépy, which communicated a positive and daliant picture of the Jews.[34]

As mentioned above, focusing on the material side of games offers another entrance point to the study of inequality. Game boards and sets made for members of the higher social strata were very elaborated and produced of expensive materials, exactly to demonstrate the wealthy position of their owners, in relation not only to the other classes, but in some cases also to other members of their own social circle. To limit myself to medieval Europe, I could mention luxury game sets, as for example the Lewis chessmen, that might be opposed to simple and cheaper game sets that were used by the lower social strata.[35]

Game sets also have functioned as status symbols. The same applies for the possession of skills in various types of games, mainly games of intellectual character. Speaking about medieval Europe, Serina Patterson claims that games functioned as arenas for social restrictions from at least the twelfth century, when gameplay started becoming a marker of prestige and class difference within the gentry, which included knights, civil servants and landowners.[36]

Speaking about the highest strata of both premodern and modern societies, special restrictions were in various cases applied to royals, who had to constantly

think of their public image and how it could be influenced, positively or negatively, by the games they played and their gameplay. To limit myself to the high medieval times, Pavel Židek, an educated clergyman and courtier in the Bohemian kingdom in the fifteenth century, advises that a king should never play games for stakes with his subjects, presenting that as a no-win situation: if he wins, he demonstrates greedy; if he gets defeated, he suffers a loss in the eyes of his subjects[37].

Finally, games and gaming have often been used as agents and arenas of restriction of the non-privileged. A good example for that is the principle of amateurism related to the modern Olympic Games. Most people know that participation in the modern Olympics was for decades prohibited to professional athletes. What most people do not know is that the background of this prohibition is not very gracious. In the beginning, when the Olympics was limited to the aristocratic cycles of Europe, amateurism was a means to lock out working people. This happened because according to the class-bound nineteenth-century British definition of amateurism, working class members did not have the right to participate in the Olympic Games, as being an amateur was understood as being financially independent, in other words independently wealthy. This, of course, created a huge debate and after some years the International Olympic Committee had to abandon this rule. Amateurism remained though an Olympic principle, referring to non-professional athletes. This principle was in its turn abandoned in 1986.[38]

The Olympics is one out of countless cases of social restriction to participate in games. But games also functioned in various periods as a means to overcome social restrictions. A typical example is flirting games, which had exactly the aim of getting people closer and giving them the opportunity to express themselves and consider the other person despite social conventions and rules. This also applies to the social play of kissing games which "is highly structured, allowing players to experience normally taboo behavior within restricted contexts".[39]

Games have been related to gender in many different ways. And, as mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, they were more often than not gender stereotyped. I will close the chapter by elaborating further on this thesis.

Games and gender

History is composed by the victors, it is true. By *male* victors, we may add, and about *male* victors and losers. In a competition on the most ignored "other" in history and historiography, it would be easy to identify women as the prize winner. From Herodotus, the Ancient Greek "father" of history, to the twentieth century, history was a male activity, or, in the vocabulary of this book, a masculine game.

This section focuses on games and gaming as sources for the study of gender issues and gendered identities in past societies. This means that I am not focusing on what women and men played in various periods but on how the games they

played and the way they participated in these games was related to their gendered identities. In other words, I will focus on whether gender played a role in what men and women played, when and where and with whom they played it, how and why, as well as on the cases of exclusion from gaming due to gender identity. I will also discuss how gender stereotypes have been depicted in board and digital games.

Given that most past societies based gender identities on the bipolar opposition man/woman, my study will also be based on this opposition as analytical tool, even if the discussion on gender as both a concept and a category of historical analysis has challenged it at least since the 1980s.[40] And as most past societies were male-dominated I will focus on how male power used games to express and promote its understanding of masculinity and femininity.

What did women play as women and men as men in various periods? How were women and men depicted in boards, cards and other visual elements of games? How has masculinity and femininity been promoted through games? Were women visible in the game social world at all? Did games promote gender stereotypes? Or did they challenge them? Was the game space divided in male and female parts? Was the game market divided into male and female market? Did women focus on different game experiences than men? And, if yes, according to which criteria and aims? These are some of the questions that may support the study of games and gaming as sources for gender history.

Game scholars have paid attention to the relationship between games and gender, particularly in the world of digital games. Their interest focuses mainly on two areas: (a) gender participation in gaming, i.e. differences in gaming between the two sexes (let it be noted that most of the relevant research is based on the man/woman gender approach) and (b) how gender identity is presented in games.

Gaming has been highly gendered in most historical periods. A lot of games have been evaluated as male games (as for example most of war games), while other have been traditionally seen as female (as for example role games simulating family life or social life). This is not just a modern phenomenon; in fact, we have many reasons to believe that the separation between the two "categories" was sharper in Antiquity and the medieval times. This does not mean that there were not mixed games. There were also games that were originally played by both women and men, to become in time "male" or "female". Serina Patterson for example writes that some medieval courtly games of chance were in the beginning played by mixed companies of players, to develop in the fifteenth century into games played strictly by women.[41] Another medievalist, Alessandro Arcangeli, witnesses to the fact that women in medieval times not only participated in "male games" but they also gambled on them.[42]

But how was female gaming understood in premodern and early modern times? An answer is given in early modern art. Studying paintings depicting women playing cards in early modern times, the art historian Antonella Fenech Kroke claims that the *femina ludens* motif demonstrates that women played both

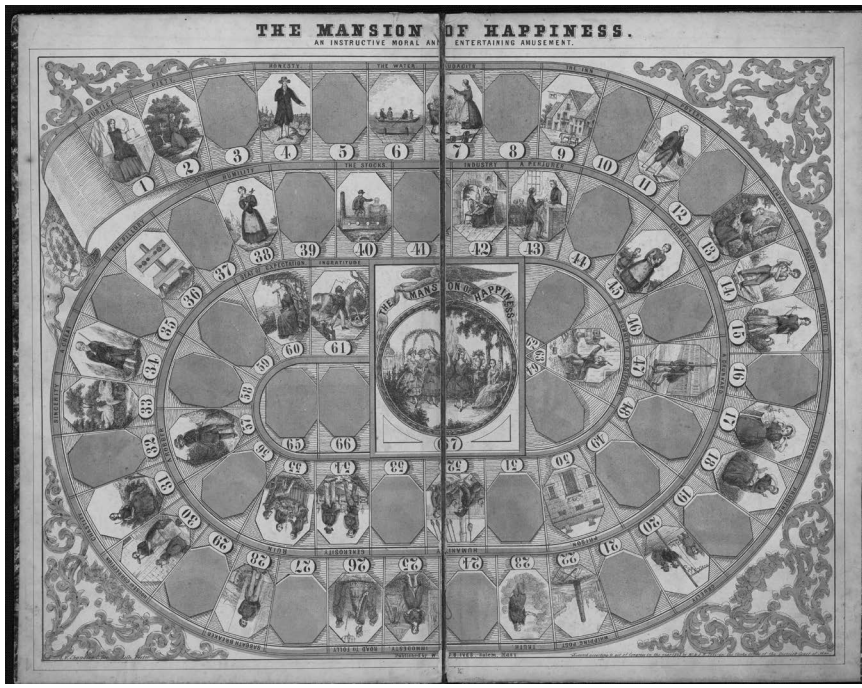
between them and against male opponents and that women were usually depicted in a stereotyped misogynistic way as weaker players who had their beauty as their only weapon.[43]

The study of how gender identity is presented in games combines approaches from gender, social, and cultural studies. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman believe that this study should focus on the consideration of cultural issues related to gendered identity.

> Investigating the cultural rhetorics of gender means examining the way that games reflect, reinforce, question or subvert cultural ideas about the categories of masculine and feminine, male and female, transgender and other concepts related to gendered identity.[44]

To illustrate the point, let us consider one of the first board games industrially produced, the *Mansion of Happiness*. Designed by the English author and game designer George Fox, it was produced around 1800 and later it was reproduced in the USA in 1843 (by W. & S.B. Ives). Its main aim was ethical: to introduce Christian values to the children who played it (to judge from its expensive production, the target group must have been children of the higher social stratum). The aim of the players was to reach the mansion of happiness, as a result of the player embracing specific Christian virtues. The players had to spin a teetotum or throw dice and race on the 67-spaces spiral track of the board. Some of the spaces were empty, others depicted places of punishment or penitence (the water, the inn, whipping post, house of correction, pillory, the stocks, prison) and still others represented virtues and vices depicted in the form of human beings. Vices sent the player back, while virtues sent her/him forth, i.e. closer to her/his goal, the mansion of happiness. What is important for our purpose is exactly the gendered presentation of virtues and vices. Honesty (4), poverty (11), passion (14), sabbath breaker (28), a cheat (34), a perjurer (43), a drunkard (47), a robber (57), ingratitude (61) and the summit to dissipation (63) are presented as men, while justice (1), piety (2), temperance (13), gratitude (15), idleness (17), prudence (18), truth (23), immodesty (25), chastity (31), humility (38), industry (42) and the seat of expectation (60) as women. Audacity (7) is depicted as a woman, most probably a mother, with two children, charity (45) as a woman with a child and two infants, cruelty (20) as two boys torturing a domestic animal (dog?) of a third boy that stands by with his hands in the air, the road to folly (26) as a woman and two men, with the woman having the leading role, the house of correction (30) as two women, ruin (55) as three men talking around a table. Striking examples are the personifications of humanity (52) and generosity (54), both depicted in the form of two men, one providing aid to the other. Finally, the mansion of happiness (67) is presented as five women in a garden, one of them playing music and the rest dancing.[45]

Sometimes, it is the rules of a game that underline the different social roles and positions of the genders. In *The Game of Invention,* a Goose-type race game



"The mansion of happiness: an instructive moral and entertaining amusement", Salem Mass., W. & S.B. Ives, 1843. Marian S. Carson Collection (Library of Congress).

published in Amsterdam by Gebrs Koster in 1894, the space nr. 2 represents the invention of the sewing machine. According to the rules, a girl landing on this space receives two counters while a boy has to pay two.[46]

The study of games offers a historian the possibility of getting closer to the historical realization and perception of gender. What people were allowed or not allowed to play was often gendered, and this also applies to gameplay and metagame rules. In other words, there were rules and expectations that were dictated by the notion that the two genders have different social roles and positions. In the following pages, we will study some of these gendered elements. I would like to underline once more that this study is limited to the use of woman and man as analytical categories; but this usage is not covering the whole spectre of gender game studies in the recent decades[47].

Games, gaming and femininities

In most past societies, female participation in playing games reflects the general social notions on the social position and role of women. As most historical societies were male-dominated, games and gaming were sociocultural arenas that, more often than not, were difficult for women to master, in many cases even to participate in. This section discusses female gaming and female ideals and

stereotypes that were maintained and promoted in and through games, as well as the sexualization of women in digital games.

Let me start by referring to the very recent past, that of digital games. A study published in 2001 by the organization *Children Now* shows that in the USA at the turn of the millennium, out of 1716 game characters analysed in the study, 64% of platform game characters were male, 19% nonhuman, and 17% female. Furthermore, 73% of player-controlled characters were male, 15% nonhuman, and 12% female, of which 50% were simply props or bystanders (meaning that they did not participate in the game action at all).[48] At the same time, modern studies show that in the world of digital games female players almost equal the numbers of the male ones. According to *PC Data* for example, in 2000 45% of digital games players were female.[49] But this was not at all the case until the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Starting from a reference point two and a half millennia old, namely the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, Martin van Creveld, a modern military historian who has also studied war games, presents war games as the arena where the difference between men and women may be observed par excellence.[50] This might be applied to a number of other game types, as well as to individual games. In the following pages, I will examine briefly cases from various periods, in an effort to demonstrate the diachronic dimension of the phenomenon.

Indeed, particularly in war games, there is a gender gap. Even though the relevant statistics have been changed recently with the introduction of digital war games, this area is still male-dominated. Van Creveld explains this by arguing that women did not participate in war either. But how could we explain their absence from games that do not demand physical strength as for example chess? Van Creveld presents some interesting evidence on women's absence from the world of chess, showing that female chess players have a considerable magnitude in just a few countries (he names Hungary, Ukraine and China) and that on global level no more than 7% of the rated players are female. He adds that if one takes into consideration the gender identity of top-level players, things get worse: "as of 2011, women made up just one 1.6 percent of all grandmasters, living or deceased".[51] The absence of women from such games is a research issue that asks for a specifically designed study of the subject.

The extremely low participation of women in war games resulted in the fact that the ones who played were seen as strange and deviant. This changed in the 1970s due to two reasons: First, that feminists tried to show that women could join in traditional male activities and, second, that game producing companies tried to extend their market by including women to their clientele. Recently, female participation in digital games, including war games, has been increased. Women introduced themselves to online gaming, not only to enjoy the game but also as an act of socialization.

Gendered differences in gaming is not a modern phenomenon. Common logic dictates that we should expect this to have been the case in every historical period: the game world of girls was narrower than that of boys. Let us get back

to the medieval times, for example. Nicholas Orme, referring to literature and documentary evidence, claims that what aristocratic girls learned and played was more limited than what the boys did and that for both aristocratic girls and boys learning to play specific games was part of their education.[52]

Similar socio-cultural restrictions are still powerful in various societies in the world. I mentioned above that the game *Mancala* has been in several African societies related to adult male social prestige, which made the participation of women very problematic.[53] This is one out of many cases demonstrating the fact that the limits, the content and the quality of female participation in games have been strongly related to gender stereotypes.

In various periods, games promoted ideals and stereotypes related to the gendered identity of women. The most telling example is games promoting the social ideal on wifehood and motherhood. Under maternal control and encouraging, girls played games designed to prepare them for their domestic adult role.[54]

Furthermore, women have been presented in games in certain ways. Most of these ways reveal a male approach to women's social position and status, something that may be explained by the fact that most game designers in history, even in our days, have been men. Unfortunately, in various periods, game representations of women include antiwoman, antifeminist and misogynistic elements. This is something that gets back at least to the medieval times. Studying the game-text *Ragemon le Bon* for example, Serina Patterson registers such elements in medieval France. She writes that the nature of women is one of the core themes in the game-text, which includes "contrasting representations of women and men" that demonstrate antifeminist perceptions. Finally, she adds that in *Ragemon le Bon* "many of the fortunes depict women as projections of male desire".[55]

Another medieval game-text, *Le Jeu d'Aventure*, presents indirectly some of the desirable gentry female qualities. The text consists of short "fortune-texts" that should be discussed between the players in a game-based social interaction, supposed to help the players to get to know each other better. This is what one of the game's fortunes says for a female player: "You are fun-loving, courteous and pretty, and an excellent speaker with your words. You love dogs and birds and will have much of your desire".[56] Commenting on the fortune, Serina Patterson writes:

> The fortune reinforces desirable attitudes, including beauty, eloquence, and a fondness for pets, and illustrates how players could imagine themselves in this fictive world of courtly dalliance. For male players, receiving these fortunes could provide a humorous subversion of gender normativity. The aim of the fortunes was not simply to describe a player's character but, rather, to draw out innuendo and playful courtship, much like modern party games such as "Truth or Dare" and "I never", which also operate on the basis or truth telling to reveal new aspects of players and craft moments of embarrassment and dalliance[57].

Nineteenth-century board games are another good example of the diffusion of stereotypes related to the social role of women. The strongest and most important was, of course, related to getting married and giving birth to healthy children, preferably male. Consider for example the Victorian card game *Old Maid*. It was played with a normal card-pack but only one of the four queens was included in the game. The players tried to pair the cards and put the pairs on the table. At the end the only unpaired card will be the old maid and the player who had her at hand lost the round or the game. The whole game promoted indirectly the idea that the worst thing that may happen to a woman is that she remains unpaired, that is unmarried.[58]

Another very interesting point in the historical study of games in relation to femininities is that on the sexualization of women in game design. The figure that comes almost automatically in mind when we think of sexualizing women in games is Lara Croft, the protagonist of the digital game (and later the movie) *Tomb Raider*, probably the only female sex-symbol so far to have originated in a game.[59] An intelligent adventurer, Lara Croft has been famous mainly and mostly for her sexy appearance and her aggressive sex appeal. Dressed in anything else than practical shorts and tops which underline her athletic body, she is designed to provoke male fantasies. The same applies to most other female combat characters in games.[60]

In the *Children Now* study mentioned above, female sexuality is often expressed in highly revealing clothing. Approximately 20% of the characters studied wear clothes that leave breasts, buttocks and/or midriffs exposed, while revealing clothing is the case for only 8% of the male characters.[61] This has led a number of game scholars to express the opinion that a considerable amount of female characters are used as "sexual eye candies".[62]

Games, gaming and masculinities

As mentioned before, the world of games has almost always been mainly a male world. Already in ancient Egypt, gaming scenes depicted in pyramids give the leading role to men, as for example in the tomb mural showing the artisan Sennedjem playing Senet against an invisible opponent, while his wife Lyneferty supports him, or the mural of pharaoh Ramses III (1186–1155 BC) playing Senet against two women.[63] And as we have seen in the previous chapter, even in the visual elements of game sets, men were so often depicted as superior to women that it is legitimate to claim that the world of games is full of not only female but also male stereotypes.

Masculinities have been studied less than femininities, not only in relation to games and gaming but also in historical studies in general. The study of what it means to be male was taken up in the 1980s and since then scholars from various fields, including history, have enriched gender studies with works on the male identity, its expressions in various sociocultural environments, or the burden of social and other expectations concerning a series of "duties" that escort the male

identity. Male gaming has not been studied to the extension of female gaming, probably because male gaming has been perceived as the "normal" in most historical periods.

Henry Jenkins studied boy culture in an article dedicated to gendered play spaces. Referring to the sociologist E.A. Rotundo, he writes that in past societies (he speaks mainly about nineteenth-century USA) "boys escaped from the home into the outdoors play space, freeing them to participate in a semi-autonomous 'boy culture' which cast itself in opposition to maternal culture".[64] This is something that may be applied more generally: we may think that in many cases, men find in gaming the opportunity to revolt against all the rules that restrict them and, most importantly, to do so within the safe environment of the game world, which means without real consequences.

It seems that in the recent decades, they have to fight against a new enemy: the social expectations a man has to answer to, as a part of his gendered identity and social role. Philip Zimbardo and Nikita Coulombe published in 2015 a book studying how modern technology has sabotaged what it means to be male. As mentioned above, their main fields of study are extensive digital gaming and extensive watching of online porn. One of their focal points is exactly the high social expectations for boys and young men. Most of these expectations are gendered.

The two sociologists write that in our days, the uncertain world around us has made being a male more difficult than what it was in the past. In other words, everyday life (what in their model they call "situation") has changed but the expectations for the ideal male behaviour and social performance ("the system") have remained equally high.

This results in a considerable amount of young men who, not being able to stand up to the expectations (and often being bullied for that, even by their own family and friends), withdraw from social life and find refuge in the safer world of video games (and, regarding their erotic activity, in online porn).[65]

This need for safety and refuge gets more intense due to the fear for failing, which is something heavier for men than for women, as the male stereotypes dictate that men have to succeed in everything they undertake, the unsuccessful ones being evaluated as inferior, or even useless. This, according to Zimbardo and Coulombe, results in young men getting overshadowed by a feeling of shyness that locks them in their bedrooms.[66]

A lot of these pressing male expectations are related to very old stereotypes, coming from ages that were very different from the present and referring to societies totally different from the modern ones. The problem is that social changes notwithstanding, these stereotypes remain unchanged. In the following lines, I am presenting just a few of them, related to the game world.

One of these stereotypes is related to the position of a man in the hierarchy of the social or the sociopolitical system he is a member of. The male world being strongly hierarchical and based on a hegemonic view of the male, it has always been important for any player of any game to win, or at least not to

lose extensively. The pejorative content of calling somebody a "loser" (coming directly from the worlds of games and sports) is not something new. In many periods and societies, losing in games was perceived as a sign of weakness that had its consequences outside the magic circle of the game. This weakness challenged the "loser's" capability in other areas (for example in politics or his social environment); sometimes it also challenged his very masculinity—is a "loser" a real man?

Another male stereotype has in many societies been that a man must be physically strong. This is something expressed also in the design of male characters in digital games: a 2001 study shows that 35% of the male characters analysed have hyped-muscularized bodies. But the stereotype of physical strength is in fact something that—depending upon the game type examined—may be challenged in the world of games. As many games may be won not by the strongest player but by the one that has more skills, is best in tactics, or may combine skills and tactics, the magic circle has been the place where excel was possible for men who were not that powerful in physical terms. This is also the case with digital games, where young men marginalized as "weak" or "nerds" may become invincible, and thus admirable.

★★★

Closing this chapter, I would like to repeat that the historical study of games in social terms might reveal a lot of unique and very interesting pieces of evidence, particularly in the field of micro-history. Gaming is an activity that does not only reflect the sociocultural values, principles and priorities of the relevant historical entities but in has the ability of influencing the function of these entities. In some cases, this influence might prove very problematic, or even disastrous. In various periods and places, political authorities on local, regional or state level tried to regulate this influence by issuing laws and rules that would protect the players from their gaming passions. This is one of the things I am dealing with in the next chapter, which also studies the interrelation between games and politics in a more general perspective, including the study of games as media of political communication, as diplomatic tools or as agents of "low politics".

NOTES

1 Fine 2015: 216.
2 During the last decades the need has been stressed to study games in race- and gender terms. See for example Leonard 2006; he focuses on video games but most of his points are valid for non-digital games as well. I believe that we also need game studies focusing on religious and cultural identities.
3 Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 478–479. The magic circle could be understood as the temporary world (in fact a spacetime) created by and in a game; it is created at the start of the game and it lasts as long as the game is played. On the magic circle see Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 92–99; Huizinga 1949: 10–12. It should be noted that the magic circle theory has been criticized, particularly by digital game scholars, as taking for granted a division between play and real life and neglecting the strong

interweaving and interaction between these two worlds. See for example the chapter "The almost-magic circle" in Castronova 2008: 147–160; Zimmerman 2012; Consalvo 2009; Woodford 2008; Malaby 2007. On the debate on the magic circle see Nguyen 2017: 9–10.

4 Caillois 2001: 43–44.
5 Malaby 2007: 98.
6 Caillois 2001: 82–83.
7 See Burke 2005: 38–43.
8 Geertz 2005.
9 Fine 2015: 3.
10 Fine 2015: 19.
11 Huizinga 1949: 13.
12 Fine 2015: 2.
13 Mäyrä 2008: 25.
14 Zimbardo & Coulombe 2015: loc. 100–103 (Kindle).
15 Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 473.
16 In game studies, the research strategy of focusing on the social dimension of games is known as the *sociogenic approach* to games. The main claim of this approach is that "games are to be understood in terms of what they do for society, rather than in terms of how they meet the needs of the individual" (Avedon & Sutton-Smith 2015/1971: 432).
17 Malaby 2007: 108.
18 Hofer 2003: 84–85. You might also find a picture of the board online: https://boardgamegeek.com/image/790943/monopolist.
19 On Chinese promotion games, see Lo 2004.
20 Patterson 2015b: 81.
21 Patterson 2015b: 83.
22 Patterson 2015b: 89, fortune nine.
23 On the heart as a cultural symbol and as a center of personality in high medieval times, see Høystad 2009: 111–150.
24 Midgley 1974: 237.
25 Townshend 1979: 794.
26 Townshend 1979: 795.
27 Bubczyk 2015: 39. Tables is a family of games similar to backgammon; see Murray 1941, Murray 1951: 117–129 and Parlett 1999: 58–87.
28 In ancient Rome for example games of chance were perceived as a characteristic plebeian activity; see Purcell 1995: 17.
29 Avedon & Sutton-Smith 2015/1971: 273.
30 Orme 2015: 53.
31 Walker 2007: 250–252.
32 Lévi-Strauss 1966: 32; emphasis in the original.
33 Ortalli 1997: 111.
34 See Seville 2016d: 42–44.
35 See Patterson 2015a: 2.
36 Patterson 2015b: 80.
37 Bubczyk 2015: 26.
38 See Boykoff 2016: 19–22.
39 Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 480.
40 See for example Scott 1986 and Boydston 2008, both discussing other works of gender theorists.
41 Patterson 2015b: 82.
42 Arcangeli 2003: 100.
43 See Kroke 2017.
44 Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 522.

45 On *The Mansion of Happiness* see Whitehill 1999: 119–122 and Seville 2016d: 140–143.
46 Seville 2016d: 111.
47 The queer approach for example has recently been introduced to game studies; see Ruberg & Shaw 2017.
48 Glaubke et al. 2001: 13 and 15; see also Leonard 2006: 84.
49 Glaubke et al. 2001: 19.
50 Van Creveld 2013: 320.
51 Van Creveld 2013: 282.
52 Orme 2015: 55.
53 See Townshend 1979: 794.
54 See for example Jenkins 2006: 336: "Historically, girl culture [was] formed under closer maternal supervision and girls' toys were designed to foster female-specific skills and competences and prepare girls for their future domestic responsibilities as wives and mothers".
55 Patterson 2015b: 90.
56 Patterson 2015b: 83, fortune nine.
57 Patterson 2015b: 84.
58 It should be noted that in both Germany and France the equivalent game had a male "protagonist" and it was called *schwarzer Peter* (Black Peter) and *vieux garçon* (Old Boy) respectively (Parlett 2006).
59 The game was designed by Toby Gard and produced in 1996 by Square Enix Europe. Lara Croft's sexuality has been broadly discussed by game and gender scholars. See for example Han & Song 2014; Jansz & Martis 2007; Kennedy 2002.
60 See for example Cassell & Jenkins 1998; Kafai et al. 2008.
61 Glaubke et al. 2001: 17.
62 See for example Leonard 2006: 84.
63 See Botermans 2007: 163–164.
64 Jenkins 2006: 337, referring to Rotundo 1994: 37.
65 Zimbardo & Coulombe 2015: loc. 130–131 (Kindle).
66 Zimbardo & Coulombe 2015: loc. 401–406 (Kindle).

5

GAMES OF POLITICS

In 1793, in the middle of the French Revolution, a playing card-pack was produced in Paris.[1] Its most characteristic feature is that following the spirit of the period, the royal figures are replaced by figures representing some of the main visions of the Revolution, personified in geniuses, liberties and equalities. Their depiction is enriched with symbols of the Revolution.[2] Each card is dedicated to a principle or a vision, inscribed in the card as a motto in its upper right corner. The figures themselves and the way they are depicted, the symbols that surround them and the texts printed on the cards, make the pack a visual medium of political communication and rhetorics.

The Aces, which are the cards of highest value, were renamed as Laws. In each of the four cards, the symbol of the suit is depicted in a rhombus made of ancient Roman *fasces* tied together. All cards have the inscriptions *La Loi* and *Rép. Fra.*, i.e. *The Law* and *French Republic*. The use of this symbol shows that the revolutionaries saw back to the Roman Republic as the prototype for the state they had dreamed of, a state ruled by law.

The kings were replaced by *Geniuses*. The genius of hearts depicts Hercules as *Génie de la Guerre* (Genius of War). The ancient Greek and Roman divine hero is identified by the lionskin he wears around his head. In his right hand he holds a short sword surrounded with a laurel wreath and in his left a shield with the inscription *Pour la République Française* (for the French Republic). The motto of the card reads *Force*. The king of clubs was replaced by an unidentifiable ancient god as *Génie de la Paix* (Genius of Peace).[3] In his right hand he holds the Roman symbol of *fasces* together with an olive branch, reflecting the Pax Romana. The word *Union* is inscribed in the *fasces*. In his left hand, he holds a scroll with the inscription *Loix* (Law). The motto of the card reads *Prospérité*. The genius of spades shows Apollo as *Génie des Arts*. He is identified in the inscription *Apollon* at the base of the statue of himself he holds in his right hand and the lyre he holds

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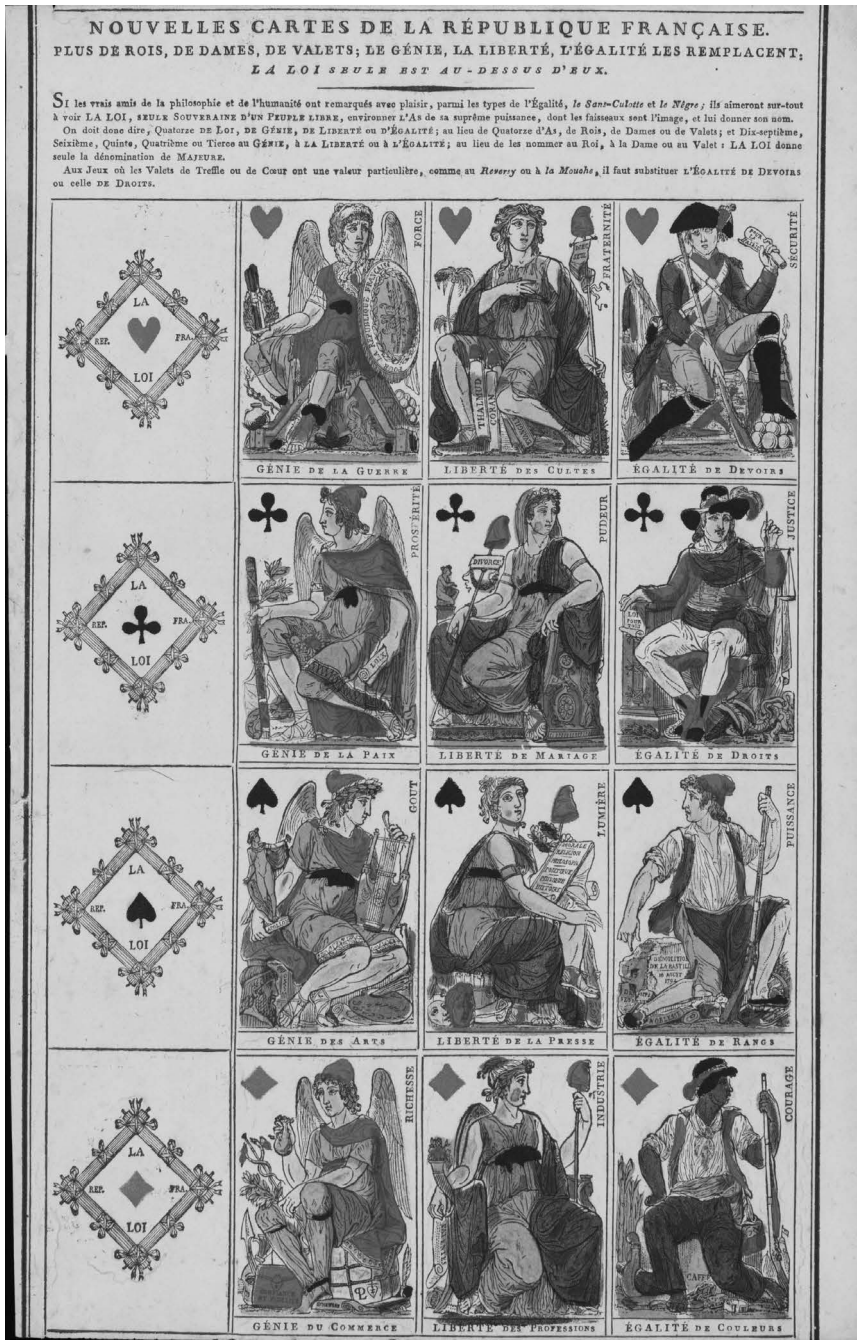
in his left. He is surrounded by symbols of arts and learning. The motto reads *Goût* (taste). The king of diamonds was transformed into Mercury as *Génie du Commerce*, holding the characteristic caduceus along with an olive branch. He is sitting on a bail of goods, inscribed with a combination of the letters P and L and a heart with a cross through it. In his right hand he holds a purse. By his feet there is a brief case with the inscription *Confiance et fidélité* (trust and loyalty), a wallet with the word *Échange* (exchange) and a book with a piece of paper inserted in it which reads *Ordre* (order). The motto reads *Richesse* (wealth).

The Queens are replaced by Liberties. All four of them hold a spear topped with the red Phrygian cap. The queen of hearts is dedicated to *Liberté de Cultes*, the Freedom of Worship (notice that the hearts are still related to religious faith, as in the traditional card-pack). On her spear there is a pennant with the inscription *Dieu seul* (God alone). Between her feet there are three voluminous books bearing the titles *Thalmud*, *Coran* and *Evangile*, which in relation with the motto *Fraternité* demonstrate the ideal of peaceful relationships between the three monotheistic religions. The Liberty of clubs (*Liberté du Mariage*) is dedicated to equality of the sexes. Her spear has a sign with the word *Divorce*, which signifies the freedom of women in marriage. Beside the Liberty there is a statuette of Venus, personifying erotic love and chastity. The motto of the card reads *Pudeur* (modesty). The queen of spades, reshaped to *Liberté de la Presse*, is dedicated to the freedom of speech. In the scroll she holds the concept of press is identified as *Morale, Religion, Philosoph[ie], Physique, Politique, Histoire*. The motto of the card, *Lumiére*, relates the freedom of speech to the Enlightenment (*Siècle des lumières*). The Liberty of diamonds is dedicated to *Liberté des Professions* (Liberty of Profession). She is depicted with a cornucopia and a pomegranate, symbols of abundance. She holds a scroll with the word *Patentes*, and the motto of the card reads *Industrie*.

The Jacks (in French "Valets") were transformed into four male figures called Equalities (*Egalités*): A soldier, a judge, a non-privileged member of the society (*sans-culottes*) and an ex slave. The Jack of hearts, renamed to *Égalité de Devoirs* (Equality of Duty), depicts a soldier in the battlefield, sitting on a drum, fighting for the fatherland as the inscription in a scroll he holds reads: *Pour la patrie*. The motto of the card reads *Sécurité*. The Equality of clubs bears the name *Égalité de Droits*, Equality of Rights. It shows a judge holding a scale of justice in his left hand. On a scroll he touches with his right hand there is the inscription *La loi pour tous* (the law for all). His right hand is leaning on something like a miniature of an altar that bears the Roman symbol of *fasces*. The card's motto is *Justice*. The Jack of spades was devoted to *Égalité de Rangs*, or Equality of Ranks, or social classes. It is personified in a *sans-culottes* holding a musket. He is sitting on a stone with the inscription *Démolition de la Bastille. 10 Août, 1792*. Two scrolls on the ground are titled as *Noblesse* (nobility) and *Droits feodeaux* (feudal rights). The card has the motto *Puissance* (strength). Finally, the Jack of Diamonds was transformed to *Égalité de Couleurs*, Equality of Races. It shows a dark-skinned ex slave (most probably a plantation worker) holding a musket. He is sitting on a bale with the inscription *Caffé*, his broken shackles painted under his feet. The motto of the card reads *Courage*.



"Nouvelles Cartes de la République Française", produced by Urbain Jaume and Jean-Démosthène Dugourc, Paris 1793. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Much could be said on the symbolism of the cards. To keep it short, the cards demonstrate the visions of the revolutionaries for the French state and society: Abolition of royal and feudal privileges, the rule of law, equality under the law independently of sex, class, or race, prosperity on the basis of industry, trade and commerce, religious tolerance and freedom of speech. This is expected. Let us not forget that "immediately after the French Revolution of 1789, games had to be modified to eliminate all traces of the *Ancient Régime*".[4]

There is also a strong historical symbolism in the cards, which underline the Roman Republic as the historical paradigm the revolution was based on. This is clearly demonstrated in the Roman mythological figures personifying the Geniuses, the Roman costumes of the Geniuses and the Liberties, and the symbol of *fasces* that is depicted in a number of cards. The depiction of the four Geniuses as Roman deities shows that the producers of the card wanted to express their repulsion not only to monarchy but also to the political power and social influence of the Church.

It is not my intension to discuss the deep political and historical symbolism of this impressive card-pack. I will limit myself in pointing at it as a characteristic example showing that games can be valuable sources for the study of political history. To start with, the study of games and gaming can contribute only to some extend to the study of what is usually called history of "high" politics that is the historical study of political regimes, policy-making and execution of policies. But politics are not limited to government, law-making and policies. There is another side of politics, of equal importance, that is related to the interaction between political power and the societies at question. It is this interaction that may be better illuminated and analysed by using games as historical sources.[5]

Today, the online world offers a huge amount of digital games based on politics and the exercise of power. But games based on politics are not a modern phenomenon. As David Parlett has pointed out, such games have a long history which has not yet been studied to the extent they deserve. He writes that "games based on politics—a cross between crime, fantasy and alternative history—go back a long way, but have yet to produce a classic".[6] Two decades later, this classic has not yet been composed.

The study of the relationship between games and politics includes various areas. Some of them, as for example how modern political communication has been influenced by the world of games,[7] will not be studied here. What we will focus on in this chapter is how to study games that are related, one way or another, to political history. In the first section of the chapter, I am reflecting on games as media of visual political communication. Then, I am discussing games as witnesses of political history. Third, I am presenting a few thoughts on the relation of games to diplomacy and then I will speak about games as agents and witnesses of "low politics". Finally, I am focusing on the relationship between games and justice, to consider how political regimes in various periods tried to control games by issuing *ad hoc* laws and rules.

Games as media of visual political communication

This chapter was opened with the case of a playing card-pack that was used for the communication of political rhetoric during the French revolution. I can now add that this is not the only case of playing cards used this way in the French Revolution. In another card-pack, the traditional royal figures of the four suits were replaced by figures having a strong symbolic content. One of them was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, one of the most prominent figures of eighteenth-century France. He was one of the kings, while the other three came from Antiquity: The Roman statesman and philosopher Cato was representing the combination of democracy and philosophy, the Greek statesman and lawmaker Solon was to personify the rule of law, while the Roman politician Marcus Junius Brutus, known as one of the assassins of Julius Caesar, symbolized the forces that would eliminate the royal power in France. The queens were replaced by personifications of Prudence, Unity, Justice and Fortitude, while all four figures replacing the Jacks came from Roman Antiquity (Hannibal, Mucius Scaevola, Horace and Decius Mus), witnessing again on the Roman Republic and culture as the standard of the French revolution.[8]

The revolutionaries also published board games dedicated to the Revolution. Two such games, both of the type of the *Goose*, belong today to the Waddesdon Manor, Rothschild Collection. Both are produced by anonymous publishers, in 1790 and 1791. The board of the first presents the story of the Revolution from the storming of the Bastille to the National Assembly in 1789. The second focuses on the signing of the constitution by Louis XVI on 14 September 1791.[9]

The card and board game equipment of the French Revolution is an example of game material related directly to politics. Paraphrasing the theory of culturalization of games, here we may speak of the politicization of games and game equipment in order to propagate political change and impregnate the society with the principles and visions of the new regime.

Such efforts have also been registered in the twentieth century. In 1960 for example, when South Africa decided to brake with the British Commonwealth and become a republic, the suit-symbols of the playing card-decks were changed too: Spades were transformed into wagon wheels, hearts into powder horns, diamonds into tent pegs and clubs into shoes.[10] This change was to symbolize the new era for South Africa, an era that should be differentiated in as many things related to the British culture as possible.

But the practice is old, much older than the French Revolution, as we may realize by reflecting on the very denominations of the honour figures, or court figures, that were replaced by the cards of the revolutionaries (this also goes for the central significance of royal and feudal figures used in other medieval games, as for example chess). First of all, it should be said that the honour cards were not standardized visually until the nineteenth century. Before that, particularly before the typographical production of cards, their producers painted the figures on the basis of portraits they had access to. What is interesting for the political

historian is the consideration of which political figures were chosen as models. Cases of card-packs in which the figures on the honour cards are named show that the Old Testament king David and Napoleon Bonaparte were used as models for the king of spades; Charlemagne, Constantine the Great and Charles I of Britain for the king of hearts; Julius Caesar for the king of diamonds; Alexander the Great for the king of clubs; the Greek goddess Athena, and later the biblical Bathsheba, or Joan of Arc for the queen of spades; Helen of Troy, St. Helena (the mother of Constantine the Great), Dido, Juno, Fausta, Joan of Arc, queen Elizabeth I, and Roxane for the queen of hearts; the Amazon queen Penthisilea and later on the biblical Rachel for the queen of diamonds; the Roman Lucretia or the queen of Troy Hecuba for the queen of clubs.[11]

By studying the historical, biblical or mythological figures that were depicted in various periods and places as kings and queens we get evidence on the influence of history and religion in the society that produced and played the cards. By focusing on the political figures in particular, we may identify which leaders were popular and respected in various periods and places.

But the visualization of royal figures was not the only way of including political messages in the playing cards. J.R.S. Whiting studied playing cards produced in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and identified fourteen packs, produced by various publishers, depicting political events of the period. He notes that "these packs provide the historian with an 'off beat' source of evidence, particularly on the political bias and rumours of the period". The content of the cards leads him to evaluate them as "a deliberate propaganda exercise" which was to answer to the press censorship of the period.[12]

Another form of political communication through games is a practice that was popular among political leaders. The trick is simple: the leader plays a game against one or more citizens and demonstrates his (and in modern times her) skills and power by winning. Needless to say, in the majority of cases, particularly in Antiquity and the medieval times, the chances of the citizen winning against the emperor or the king were carefully eliminated on beforehand, in various ways. A characteristic example is that of Roman emperors fighting as gladiators in the amphitheatre (see Chapter 7). But the practice has survived to the modern times. In Uganda for example, enthronement ceremonies in the beginning of the twentieth century included a game round of *Mancala* between the new king and one of his subjects.[13]

Apart from facilitating visual communication, games have in various periods been arenas of political activity or witnessed on political history and culture. It is to this dimension of games I will turn my focus in the following pages.

Games as witnesses and agents of political history

From the second half of the twentieth century, war games became very popular both in the USA and in Europe. But they did not have the same profile everywhere. In post-war Germany for example, war games had to be culturalized (in

fact, politicized) in a way that reflected a strong disinclination toward anything reminiscent of the Second World War and the atrocities of the Nazis. This culturalization was also dictated by strict laws that prohibited anything that could be related to the Nazis and their ideology. Stewart Woods illustrates the point by referring to the popular game *Risk* (Hasbro 1957), which was launched globally as a game of "global domination", while the German version presented "liberating the world" as the main aim of the player.[14]

Games with explicit or implicit political content have in various periods been in dialogue with the political system and the political culture around them, being more often than not heavily influenced by them. This influence is reflected in changes related to the content and the rules of the game, which are sometimes valuable witnesses of political history. There are also cases, when games simply reflect the political situation of the historical entity they refer to. In other cases, they also witness on the political culture of the historical entity that produced and played them. Let us start by considering a few examples of games reflecting political history.

The *Elephant Game of the Seven Kingdoms* (in Chinese *Qiguo xiangqi ju*) was a chess-like game played in ancient China. It reflects the political and military situation in the so-called Warring States Period (480–221 BC). The game is played with 120 pieces, one of which represents the Empire of Zhou, while the rest are equally divided between the seven kingdoms: Qin, Chu, Han, Qi, Wei, Zhao and Yan. Each player is the prime minister of a kingdom. The main political message included implicitly in the rules of the game is that the kingdoms fight between them and the winner is decided between them, but they never attack (they cannot attack) the empire. A secondary message is presented in the rule regulating the order in which the players play and what happens if there are not seven players to play the game. Which of the kingdoms will be prioritized and which are of secondary importance is not decided by the will of the players, but it is standardized in the rules of the game, something that reflects the political (and military?) significance of each of the seven kingdoms.[15]

The ancient Greek board game of *Polis* has been studied as a medium of political ideology, as a part of a cultural and political struggle between egalitarian and elitist tendencies within the Athenian aristocracy. *Polis* was a game of skill that existed from at least the fifth century BC. Unfortunately, its rules have not survived, but we know that is was a battle game played without dice between two players, having thirty pieces each and trying to capture the pieces of the opponent by surrounding an enemy piece with two of their own. The game included elements with clear political meaning, as for example that all pieces were of equal value and that an isolated piece was dangerous to himself and the team. Both these elements reflect principles of the democratic and egalitarian political ideology of Athens in the classical period. This reading of the game is strengthened by a passage of Aristotle, who in his *Politics* (1253a) compares the cityless man (*apolis*) to an isolated piece in the game of *pessoi*. In this, Aristotle follows a line of thinking that goes back to at least Herodotus, who in the fifth century BC wrote

that the Lydians invented all the known games except *pessoi*, because they did not have conceptualized the function of the city as a political unit.[16]

There are of course games we play in our days that also reflect history. Contemporary games might be based on politics in modern times, as for example *Balance of Power* (Catalyst Game Labs, 2012), which focuses on the nineteenth century, or in distant periods, as for example *Pax Romana* (GMT Games, 2006), which is based on the establishment and expansion of the Roman Empire. There are also civilization development games or war games that include, explicitly or implicitly, the exercise of politics. The producers of most of these games have a tendency to focus on politico-military subjects. A telling example is the American civil war and its significance in American political history, which has been the main scenario of a considerable number of games.[17]

Approaching modern games from a political history perspective, a historian should focus on how the past is presented in these games and why. Adrian Seville for example studied the game *Jeu de la Victoire* (Chambrelent, 1919), one of the games that are based on the board design and the rules of the *Game of the Goose*. The board of *Jeu de la Victoire* is decorated with scenes that are supposed to give a chronologic account of the First World War. Starting from the observation that the historical information presented in the board was not accurate, Seville studied variants of the *Game of the Goose* on the theme of war that were produced before and during WW1, considering games as old as the end of the seventeenth century. His comparison of rules and decoration in relation to the icon of the enemy in the eyes of Frenchmen revealed that the game produced during WW1 presents the German leaders in a remarkable way, rather as cartoon-like figures of fun, without neither respect nor hatred.[18]

Speaking about games in modern times, we should notice that games with content related to politics were originally war games. During the twentieth century, political games included more areas, particularly simulations of how to govern a country, an area, or a city. A central category of political games now is the so-called "government simulation games" or "political simulations". They are games that ask the player to exercise leadership on local, national or international level (in some cases under challenging circumstances), to design policies and run the relevant campaigns. All these games have a strong geopolitical dimension. You may think for example of *SimCity*, which started as a city development game to end up having a broader character, as in its recent versions the player is asked to control a region and play one or more cities at once each with its own specialization[19].

What is important for our purpose is that many of these games are developed by scientists, who base their work on real-life facts and existing policies. This was also the case with games related to politics in the past. Their creators could not but be based on their contemporary and past political history. This means that by studying such a game, a historian may focus on two different things: First, indirect information on policies that are reflected in the content of the game. Second, direct information on what the developer(s) of the game evaluated as important to include in the content of the game. This second point offers the historian

complementary evidence for the study of political tendencies in the period the game was designed and produced.

Inter-nation games (games in which nations comprise distinct units of the game, each one with their own, sometimes conflicting, interests) are not limited to war games. In such games each nation is supposed to formulate and strive toward its own goals, which might be economic growth, development, security, domination or anything else. Sometimes, there are common aims, the most usual among them being cooperation or the avoidance of shared crises or emergences. In many of these cases, the employment of diplomacy is necessary.

All the above are cases of games reflecting the political reality of their times. Games may also be studied as witnesses of political culture, in other words of "the political knowledge, ideas and sentiments current in a given place and time".[20] But games do not simply reflect political history and political culture. Due to their indirect and unforced influence in the mentality of both players and non-players, they are—and have been used as—media for the promotion of ideologies, political regimes, as well as media of propaganda legitimising the distribution of political power.[21]

We may use various examples of games that promoted such ideas. Let us for example think of the Olympic Games in ancient Greece, which were one of the institutions confirming the Greek identity, as it was only freeborn citizens from Greek cities who had the right to participate. Turning over the page from Ancient Greece to the Roman Empire, we may consider the gladiatorial games as an arena of not only bloody combats but also expression of the Roman political mentality (see Chapter 7).

There were also games that aimed directly at advertising for concrete political parties and defaming their opponents. Adrian Seville presents four such games of the *Goose*-type. The first, *The Game of General Bulanger*, was published in Paris in 1889 and aimed, as the title shows, at supporting general Bulanger in the French elections of the year it was published. The second is an Italian game with the telling title *Elections are not a game*, published in Milan sometime in the period 1953–57. It was produced by supporters of the Christian Democrat Party and it instructed in "voting well", which for the producers meant voting against the communists. The third game, *White House Skidoo* (Washington, 1956) was produced by the District of Columbia Democratic Women's Day Committee. The aim of the player was to have her/his "candidate" first in the White House and the game was designed so that it was not possible for a Republican to win. The content of the game also presented the Republican president Eisenhower in negative terms. The fourth political game, *The Real Italian Game of the Goose* (Il Giuoco dell'Oca del Vero Italiano, Rome 1948) was published by the Christian Democrat Party, it was distributed for free and had as its main aim to promote the benefits of the Marshal Plan.[22]

Historical games in particular play a role in forming and maintaining political identity in an indirect and unnoticed way. Political messages related to political identity might be included in the content and the rules of the game, as well as

in its visual dimension, including the decoration of cards, boards, board game pieces, cardboard boxes and promotional material.[23] Maps presenting territories related to continents, political constellations, nations or states[24], flags and other national symbols, or statements included in the content or the rules of the game might function as agents of identity. Sometimes, these visual or linguistic agents might underline "us-ness" in relation to "otherness", as for example in a number of American games, in which Indians are presented, both visually and textually, as others, non-Americans.

Here I may add that games also establish and maintain identity in another socio-political way, when related as cultural traditions to specific ethnic identities. Philip Townshend for example writes about *Mancala* as a game that sometimes units and sometimes divides (or at least united and divided) peoples and ethnic groups in Africa. Due to the many existing variations of the game, the adoption of this or that version of it is (or at least was) related to specific sociopolitical identities. The game was thus an agent of identification but also discrimination of those who played different versions of *Mancala*.[25]

As we will see in Chapter 8, chess is a valuable example of a game reflecting politics. Not only in regards with the figures include in it, but also in relation to the numerous legends on the origins of the game. Furthermore, names and terms used for chess pieces used in various periods and places are of significance for the political historian.

I would like to close this section by referring to an element of political culture that could be studied on the basis of games. It is an element related to the contemporary image of political leaders, for example ancient and medieval kings. The main working questions here are: Which games were appropriate for a leader in the period or the historical entity we study? And which games or game activities could destroy his image or his appreciation by the people?

A first general observation is that conceptions differed in various periods. In medieval times for example, chess was supposed to be a game that was appropriate for kings and therefore most royals played it. There were also palaces that had their own chess experts to teach the princes and princesses, as well as other members of the court. There were though educated people, who believed that kings should not waste their time in playing games. Pavel Židek for example, a fifteenth-century clergyman and courtier in the Bohemian kingdom, considered chess as "a boring and time-consuming activity and thus unsuitable for anyone, especially the king".[26]

The general court mentality was in favour of games, those of course that were perceived and evaluated as suitable for royals. We know that many royals and aristocrats, as well as bishops (at least those who had an aristocratic background), played games. But what kind of games? This is something that varied, depending on the period and the society at question. Mainly there were two kinds of games, it seems: sports (including hunting and other similar activities) and board games. An important source on what was acceptable in medieval and post-medieval courts is the so-called *Specula principis*, or *Mirrors of Princes,* medieval and Renaissance treatises instructing rulers and kings-to-be on how to rule

and behave on various occasions. In these texts, board games were not only accepted but also appreciated as positive pedagogical tools.[27] There were also those who advised in the opposite direction. Let us recall a Scandinavian example, the text *Konnungs Skuggsjá*, composed in the Norwegian court by an anonymous ecclesiastic—probably Ivan Bodet, the tutor of king Håkon IV Håkonson (1217–1263). The author warns the young prince that among other things he "must beware of and shun like the devil himself" chess and throwing dice for stakes, "for upon such foundations the greatest calamities are built".[28]

Despite such warnings and negative evaluations, particularly from moralists, playing games was a rather popular activity among royals and members of the political elite. In some courts, they were so popular, that they functioned as tools in diplomatic interactions and interrelations. This is the subject of the next section.

Games and diplomacy

In the beginning of the twelfth century (probably in the year 1111) the Norwegian king Sigurd Jorsalfar (1103–1130), on his way back to Norway from Jerusalem, where he had fought as a crusader, spent some time in Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine empire. According to *Heimskringla*, a collection of sagas composed by Snorri Sturluson in Iceland around 1230, the Byzantine emperor asked him whether he would prefer to get as a present six pounds of gold, or the games organized in his honour. Sigurd preferred the games, which according to the envoys of the emperor would not cost less.[29] The games mentioned here were mainly horse racing and chariot racing enriched with public spectacles: a kind of acrobatic demonstrations, fireworks and musical performances. This is not the place to discuss the reliability of sagas as historical sources, which has been discussed by experts on various occasions. What is important for us is that the text reflects a practice that is also confirmed by other sources: the Byzantine Empire used the games, whatever they might be, as a diplomatic tool, to show its hospitality to notable guests and to impress them by the wealthiness and sophistication of the spectacle.[30]

Games were related to diplomacy already in Antiquity. The most characteristic case is the tradition known as Olympic truce: To ensure that athletes and spectators would have a safe travel to Olympia, warfare was suspended in the period before and during the games. In medieval times, game sets were exchanged between monarchs or high rank political figures as diplomatic gifts. I will limit myself to one example. As witnessed in a source from 1617, in the 1570s or 1580s, the Grand-Duke of Tuscany Francesco de Medici (1574–1587) sent as a gift to the Spanish king Philip II (1556–1598) a game set of *The Game of Goose*. What is interesting in this case is that Philip II was not interested in games, which raises the question why Francesco decided to send him such a gift. Taking into consideration that both Philip and Francesco were interested in numerology and symbolism, Adrian Seville proposes that this decision is related to the philosophical and numerological dimension of the game (on which see the opening of the introduction of this book).[31]

Apart from being used as diplomatic gifts, games might also reflect diplomatic historical evidence. In modern times particularly, diplomacy is a political activity that has become attractive to game producers. Probably the most characteristic example is the strategy board game *Diplomacy* (designed by Alan B. Calhamer and published by Wizards of the Coast, 1959). *Diplomacy* is a game of skill, set in Europe in the years before the First World War. It is played by two to seven players, each controlling the army of one of the "great powers" of the period (England, France, Germany, Italy, Austria-Hungary, Russia and Turkey). The board shows the European map divided in political terms in eighty regions. The game is played in rounds (two rounds per year from 1901 to 1914). There are rounds of public or private negotiations between the players, after which follow rounds of movements, each player deciding which land or sea regions on the game map to attack. To be successful, an attack has to be supported by the allies of the attacker. So, the players have to make alliances with players and sometimes to betray them. The final aim of the player is to control a fixed number of regions.[32]

For a historian, studying *Diplomacy*, or any other diplomacy game, might be based on various working questions related to the setting of the game (a world war, an international crisis, etc.), the countries or regions that are included in it, the supposed main interests and power level of each country, the main principles of diplomacy promoted by the game, or the supposed relationship between diplomacy and military actions.

Games and "low politics"

Historians have traditionally studied politics by focusing on the central scene, where power is executed, as well as on the institutions of political action and its protagonists. In other words, they focused on "high politics". This has also been the case with connecting games to politics. We have already considered the case of the Norwegian king Sigurd visiting Constantinople in the beginning of the twelfth century. This is a "high politics" case, in which games are used as a diplomatic tool by the Byzantine emperor. We might also think of the political use of the Olympic Games by the Nazi regime, or in relation to Apartheid[33], or by the Americans and the Russians during the Cold War.[34]

But in the recent decades a new approach to political history has challenged this tradition. Historians started focusing on what has been coined as "politics from below" or "low politics". Let us, by way of example, consider Peter Claus and John Marriott, who speak about the possibility of a dual focus when studying politics in past times:

> Politics is about power and political history is about the history of power. Or it is concerned with the history of theories about power, focusing, for example, upon issues connected to the central state or local government, or histories of democracy or citizenship. Histories of "high" politics have

> become rarer in recent years, as historians have instead turned to popular politics or "politics from below", which emphasise electoral sociology, trade unions, the role of pressure groups and the like.[35]

The study of games gives an excellent starting point for a study of politics "from below". Games have the ability of penetrating and influencing, directly or not, all social strata, that is all political networks, official and unofficial. Thus, they can be used to promote the needs of lower political strata and to educate people to participate in low politics. Think for example of the game *Strike* (Fratire Publishing, n.d.), an "educational union strategy board game about collective bargaining, political persuasion, labor negotiations, organizing and striking".[36]

A specific element of low politics incorporated in games is related to the diffusion of political ideas related to social, economic, or environmental issues, to name but a few. Games including elements of gender equality or inequality, heavy or low taxation, the role of banks in a society, or green energy have by definition a political dimension.

There are also cases, when winning in games that are traditional for a suppressing state proved a meaningful way of resistance from the peoples under its authority. In 1983 for example, the Korean player of *Go* Jo Chi-hun won all major titles in Japan, where *Go* is something more than a game due to its very long tradition. Even if Japan was the already *former* colonizer of Korea, the triumph of Jo Chi-hun had a special effect in the Korean pride and contributed to the diffusion and the popularity of the game in his home country.[37]

Apart from including, one way or another, elements of low politics, games have also played a direct political role. In various periods, games have been used as a medium or an arena or resistance to political authorities and powers. The example of the "human rights salute" (also known as "black power salute") in the Olympic Games of Mexico in 1968 is very characteristic. In the medal ceremony of the 200-meters competition, two of the three medalists, the African-American sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos, performed an act of political demonstration. They stood on the podium without shoes and they heard the national anthem with their heads bent and raising their black-gloved hand in a salute to demonstrate for the violation of human rights of the poor and the black people.[38]

During the twentieth century, international sports became symbolic representations of political competition between states. For some states, this non-violent inter-state "war" was so important that they developed a doping industry that would guarantee the prestige of the country. This put a lot of pressure on the shoulders of athletes who succumbed to the use of steroids, in order to become champions and national heroes. Unfortunately, despite the fact that the phenomenon is internationally acknowledged, the significance of sport dominance as a status symbol of nations is anything but reduced recently.[39]

Let us turn from sports to digital games. I would like to refer to the game *People Power – The Game of Civil Resistance*, a political game aiming at training

people in and making up a "soft community" of nonviolent civil resistance. In its official website, *People Power* is presented as "more than a game":

> People Power is about politics, about strategy and about social change. As a leader of a popular movement you fight against tough adversaries who control the police, the army and bureaucracy, even the media. The only weapon in your hand is your strategic skill and ingenuity.
>
> People Power is more than a game. It's an opportunity to join a community of others who want to learn about civil resistance and nonviolent strategies. Everyone can design scenarios and post them on the scenario page, available to the whole community. On our Forum, you can exchange ideas with other players and scenario designers.[40]

Another example is *The Resistance*, a card-based role-playing game, in which the players are to fight against corrupt governments and their spies. This is how the game is presented in a board game website:

> The Resistance is a social deduction game where players are a part of a resistance to overthrow a corrupt government. But unbeknownst to them, they are government spies in their midst! The resistance must go on missions and succeed in completing three objectives while the spies are trying to make missions fail. Who will win?! The resistance? Or the corrupt government spies?[41]

In the chapter on games and culture, we saw how a group of youth in Sudan performed an act of cultural resistance by building a cement board of *Mancala*, different than the traditional one used in the area. This was also an act of low-politics resistance against the local elders, who reacted by protecting their political and cultural authority. Local and state authorities tried to control games in almost every historical period. One of their aims was to control the games as agents of any kind of political activity that was not in favour of the elites. But in most cases, they focused on the negative effects gaming could have on the society. The most serious negative dimension of games was of course gambling, an activity that ruined countless individuals and families. In the following pages, we will consider state and ecclesiastical laws that tried to regulate gaming and gambling in various periods.

Antigaming legislation

Games, especially games played for stakes, were a subject of legislation already in Antiquity. In medieval times and the Renaissance, the phenomena of gambling and excessive gaming and legislating against them became more intense. The close relationship of games and justice is demonstrated in the fact that Alessandro Arcangeli, a prominent scholar in medieval cultural studies, dedicates one of the

six chapters of his book *Recreation in the Renaissance: Attitudes Towards Leisure and Pastimes in European Culture, c. 1425–1675* to "Games and Law".[42]

The study of this relationship focuses mainly on antigaming legislation. Suppressing games and gaming is a very old practice that is also employed in modern times by authoritarian regimes. Think for example of chess being banned in Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini, from 1979 to 1988. The same happened in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime, along with other activities as for example billiards, movies, television, alcohol, and secular music. Afghanis caught practicing any of these activities were whipped or imprisoned.[43]

But these are not new attitudes towards games. Already in medieval times, games and gaming were evaluated by various religious and political authorities as avoidable or dangerous activities. Robert Bubczyk noted that primarily bans on games were issued by provincial church authorities and they were related to members of the clergy who had affection to gaming, but political authorities were also influenced by the practice of the church and issued their own laws against games, especially those related to gambling.[44]

As expected, the relationship between games and gambling has been evaluated in very negative terms in various periods. This is demonstrated by a series of laws and other texts, which make clear that the attitude of states, local political authorities and institutions like the Church towards gambling has been almost exclusively negative. In the following pages, we will focus on antigaming laws issued in various periods.

The Byzantine law continued the Roman prohibition of games and gambling. Various collections of laws issued by the emperor Justinian I (527–565 AD) included antigaming laws. The Justinianic legal collections *Codex Justinianus*, *Digest*, and *Novelae* include laws regulating, in fact banning, gambling. *Codex Justinianus* makes clear that "most forms of gambling were forbidden even in Republican times, but little is known of the penalty. The money lost might be recovered".[45] This law reveals that both gambling and fighting against it were understood as old practices already in the sixth century.

Codex Justinianus includes a law on dice and dice players. Regarding the wages, the law issues that money lost in gambling could be recovered retrospectively in a period of fifty years. It is only fifty years after the event that the obligation to return the lost wages to the family is erased. The relevant law aims also at limiting the damage done to the losers, regulating that no one, not even those who are rich enough to afford it, have the right to gamble more than one golden coin. It reads as follows:

> The game of dice is ancient, permitted only to contenders in games outside of working hours, but in the course of times had become a calamity, thousands of others succumbing thereto. Some play it, not knowing anything of the game, except to name the figures on the dice and have lost their property by playing day and night with silver, precious stones and gold. As a result of such misconduct, they dare to blaspheme and they execute due bills.

> Desiring, therefore, to look after the interests of our subjects, we ordain by this general law, that no one shall be permitted to play in private or public places, either in appearance or in earnest. If this order is violated, no penalty shall follow, but lost money shall be repaid and recovered in a proper action brought by those who have lost, or by their heirs; and in case they fail to bring such actions, then in actions brought by the fathers or defenders of the cities, which shall not be bared except in fifty years. The bishops of the places shall inquire into these matters, using the help of the presidents. They shall further arrange for five games; leaping, pole-vaulting, throwing javelins or pikes, wrestling and show fighting. But no one shall, even in these games, risk more than a gold piece, although he is very rich, so that when anyone happens to be best, the loss may not be great. For we do not alone regulate wars and sacred things well, but games also, threatening punishment to transgressors, giving power to bishops to investigate, and, with the help of the presidents, to curb transgression.[46]

Another Justinianic collection of laws, the *Digest*, makes clear that the law does not provide any legal consequences for anyone who beats or damages a person hosting gambling in his premises; on the contrary, punishment is due to anyone who employs violence on account of gambling:

> The Praetor says: "Where anyone beats a person in whose house a game with dice is said to have taken place, or damages him in any way; or where anything at the time has been removed clandestinely from the house, I will not grant an action. Where anyone employs violence on account of a game with dice, I will punish him as the circumstances may demand".[47]

The text of the *Digest* also comprises a law on "slaves who are beyond measure timid, greedy, avaricious, or irascible". The law includes a comment by the great Roman jurist Ulpian (ca. 170–212 AD), which informs us on two things: (a) Slaves were also participating in gambling activities, and (b) Gamblers were evaluated as equal to impostors, liars, or quarrelsome people. Here is the text:

> Pomponius says that certain authorities held that slaves who are gamblers and given to wine are not included in the Edict, just as those who are gluttons, impostors, liars, or quarrelsome, are not included.[48]

One of the *Novelae* (new laws) issued by the emperor Justinian in 546 AD, forbids prelates to not only play board games but also watch other people playing. The law reads:

> We forbid [...] all holy bishops, presbyters, deacons, subdeacons, readers and all others, in whatever religious guild or position he may be, to gamble or be participants in, or spectators of gambling, or to go to any spectacle

> for the purpose of looking on. If any of them does so, we order him to be forbidden every religious service for the period of three years, and to be sent to a monastery. If in the meantime he shows repentance commensurate with his offense, the bishops under whose jurisdiction he is may lessen the time and reinstate him in his ministry. All holy bishops who should avenge such offenses, if they know thereof but fail to avenge them, must know that they must give an account thereof to God.[49]

Commenting upon the Justinianic laws on games and betting, Alessandro Arcangeli notes that similar prohibitions for prelates are to be found in the ecclesiastical law of the period. He also notes that these laws make a de facto distinction between games of skill and games of chance, allowing in specific cases gambling in games and other competitions of skill, as for example javelin throwing, shot putting, running, jumping or dancing, wrestling, or boxing.[50]

Let us now move from Byzantium to Western Europe. An important legal issue in medieval times was related to economic obligations as consequences of gaming and gambling. The issue was simple but crucial: was the loser legally obliged to pay the stakes, or not? In other words, did the winner have a legal right to demand the payment of the stake? Or was this illicit profit? It seems that in most cases both gambling and the winnings were regulated as illegal in both civil and ecclesiastical law. This was contradicted to other gambling activities, as for example in tournaments, where it was only the playing that was illegal, not the winning.[51]

An interesting point coming up in legislation is related to the location used for gambling. Medieval legal sources show that the penalties were heavier when people played in certain places, as for example around or in front of churches, as gambling was often followed by using inappropriate language and blasphemy. Measures were also taken, so that playing dice games and gambling was kept away from places that had a public function.[52]

Another issue that should be examined by the historian is the criteria used to distinguish between legal and illegal games. A helpful source on that is the treatise *On Commutative Justice*, composed by the fifteenth-century Portuguese theologian and Carmelite friar João Sobrinho. In this work which focuses, among other things, on economic issues, Sobrinho dedicates a section to gambling (*de ludo alearum*) and he uses two main criteria to distinguish between lawful and unlawful games. A game is illegal if: (a) it is determined by chance, solely or partly; and (b) it is not played for fun but for stakes, any kind of stakes. The only games that Sobrinho approves are military exercises with lances and skilful intellectual play, provided of course that they have nothing to do with chance or gain.[53]

Another equally interesting source comes from the seventeenth century. Johannes Thomas, a professor in civil and canon law at the University of Jena in Germany, published in 1651 a treatise dedicated to gambling (*On Gamblers*). Thomas categorises games in three types: Games of skill, games of chance, and games that combine the two elements. He also states that legal are those games that were listed in *Codex Justinianus*, adding to the list chess and draughts.[54]

Commenting on the statutes and bans against gaming and gambling, Alessandro Arcangeli claims that they generally demonstrate an articulated policy by local authorities which tried to control pastimes in order to serve various political and social agendas, "from the defence of public morality to that of the economic integrity of family, from the prosecution of particular patterns of behaviour to that of specific categories of people".[55]

Let me now move from Byzantium to the western medieval Europe. Along with political and religious prohibitions, late medieval Europe experienced the phenomenon that the medievalist Gherardo Ortalli coined as "the gambler-state". This phenomenon will be the subject of the following pages. Alessandro Arcangeli introduces to the phenomenon in these words:

> From the twelfth–thirteenth century onwards, gambling gradually regained social importance, and a disciplining process took place: on one hand public authorities became more tolerant towards a number of games, established regulations and granted gambling contracts; on the other hand, such creation of legal spaces was accompanied by the multiplication of prohibitions of illegal gambling.[56]

In his ground-breaking article on the subject, published in 1997, Ortalli studied "a new attitude [that] has developed when the authorities issue licenses to run a gaming place and in exchange receive a revenue".[57] Manfred Zollinger, a contemporary gambling scholar, writes that to other scholars, commercialized gambling is supposed to be a Renaissance-phenomenon, related first to the establishment of lotteries licensed by political authorities from the fourteenth century, and from the sixteenth century onwards with the taxation of playing cards.[58]

Ortalli based his gambler-state study on a legal and administrative text (*Statutes*) issued by the Italian city of Vicenza sometime between 1387 and 1404 AD. This is one of the legal texts issued by local authorities to regulate gaming places, houses and establishments. Such licences "occurred quiet frequently in the XIII and XIV centuries",[59] the earliest known case being that of the Italian city-state of San Gimignano in 1250.[60]

The main subjects of the Vicenza law are the authorization of gambling houses and the rules these houses and the gamblers had to follow. As such, the text is a window to the gambling world of Italy at the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century.

The picture Ortalli draws is the following. Licenses were given to both full-houses and public areas, usually squares. The licensing by royal authorities seems to have begun on a large scale in Spain in 1272, when the city of Murcia issued a license on an officially taxed public gaming house. The king of Castille Alfonso X (1252–1284 AD), a monarch who was fond of games, played a role in this development. The phenomenon of *tafurerias*, as the gambling places were called in Spain, and their fiscal control by the state was spread during the fourteenth century. At the end of the Middle Ages gambling houses licensed by the

authorities were to be found "in many, scattered parts of Europe" (Ortalli discusses Spain, Italy and Flanders). Even prelates were in some cases involved in the activity, by running gambling tables or by issuing licenses and getting income from gambling houses. In Italy, the licensing of gambling houses (called *baratteria*, pl. *baratteriae*) and the relevant excise paid to the public authorities became commonplace from about the middle of the thirteenth century. The public control over *baratteriae* was first established in larger cities but it was rather soon diffused in less important centres. The *baratteria* was licensed as a financial enterprise, a kind of a monopoly on gambling games. The main aim of the public authorities was to minimize the economic, moral and social damages gambling could cause; this was to be done by public control. The attitudes towards gaming places and the legalization of gambling were by no means unanimous. Attitudes and regulations for and against gambling were changing rapidly during the period Ortalli examines.[61]

It should be noted though that what Ortalli has studied refers to the European world of gambling. Outside Europe, as for example in India, regulations providing a gain for the state had been established at least one thousand years earlier. A witness to that is a Sanskrit text, the *Arthaśastra*, composed between the second century BC and the third century AD. The text "recommends a strict control of gambling and fixes a five per cent tax at the stakes and a charge for the hire of dice to the gamblers, who were forbidden to use their own dice".[62]

Let us now turn to the *Statutes* issued in Vicenza at the end of the fourteenth century or the first years of the fifteenth. The text is indeed a window to the late medieval world of gaming, as well as social and other problems that were related to gambling.

The first thing the law makes clear is that gambling is allowed in the gambling houses and no other place in the area (§1–5). Then it proceeds to the function of *baratteriae*, in regard to setting up gaming tables and lending money (§6–8); gaming with minors (§9); lending money in the *baratteria* (§10–12); the orderliness of the gambling house (§13); cheating and gaming in dishonest ways (§14); efforts by losers to avoid paying (§15); infringement of the regulations of the gambling house (§16); blasphemy (§17); leasing of the *baratteria* (§18); the right of the licensees and their partners to carry arms (§19); operating liabilities of the licensees (§20–22); the right of the citizens, including women, to play any dice game with goods as wages up to a limited total value (§23); the right to play games of chance at Christmas and Easter (§24); the prohibition of waging alcohol (§25); the right to play in other places than the *baratteria* (§26); the right to set up gaming tables in the local fairs of San Felise and San Gallo (§27–31).

Paragraph 9 shows that minors had the tendency of entering the gaming houses, something that the law tries to prohibit. Of special interest is §11, which prohibits lending money to soldiers against horses or weapons or cloak, and decrees that "no soldier shall dare or presume to pawn weapons, horses or cloaks to gamble". Paragraph twelve prohibits gamblers to remove their clothing "down to the naked flesh in the *baratteria*" which shows that it had been a practice to

wage clothes when everything else had been lost. The most interesting element of §23 is its reference to the right of women to play and gamble, on equal terms with men. Paragraph 24 legalizes playing dice and other games of chance in the periods around Christmas and Easter, a tradition we meet in many other places and periods.

The gambler state is an important step (independently of whether it is the first or not) that leads to the present status of gambling and its handling by national and local authorities. Cities like Monaco, Las Vegas and Macau could be approached as symbols of this new status. Ranking very high among the most visited touristic destinations worldwide, they prove that the realistic danger of losing heavily is not enough to subdue the excitement of taking high risks, sometimes with stakes that may ruin the loser.

I would like to close the section on antigaming legislation with a piece of evidence related to one of the most popular games worldwide, football. Football fans may be surprised by the fact that their beloved game (in fact one of its ancestors) was prohibited by law from the fourteenth through the sixteenth century. To quote Paul Brewster, "football had been banned by Edward II [1307–1327] and other medieval kings because of the danger to life and limb, and both Henry VIII [1509–1547] and Elizabeth [1558–1603] did all they could to stamp it out completely, but with only partial success". Sixteenth-century authors writing about football speak about a game that was violent to the level of players hitting their opponent "with the deliberate intention of killing or maiming him".[63] Needless to say, the game did not lose its popularity because of that. Later it was featured with playing rules and then it reached a pick of popularity, still alive to our days.

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As we have seen, games may be used to study various issues related to political history. Many more games may be used as examples or study cases and a number of theories may be used to illuminate the evidence of the sources. Games might also be used to study the "grey zones" between politics, economy, culture and social development. Closing this chapter, I would like to underline that games alone are not enough to help a historian draw the picture of any given political past. But they are valuable in offering those colourful strokes which make the picture more clear and vivid.

NOTES

1 Probably designed by Jacques Coissieux, it is known as Joume-Dugourc pack after the names of its publishers Urbain Jaume and Jean-Démosthène Dugourc. An advertising pamphlet was published by the producers right after the production of the pack (Jaume & Dugourc 1793, treasured in the Victoria & Albert Museum in London; see https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O126731/nouvelles-cartes-de-la-republique-print-dugourc-jean-demosthene/). Both the advertising text and the patent document of the producers (*Brevet d'Invention*) that is attached to it offer useful evidence on the content of the cards and reveal the intentions of the producers.

2 Eight of the twelve figures wear or hold the characteristic red Phrygian cap, or liberty cup, of the revolutionaries. Another symbol that is repeated in the cards is the Roman *fasces,* a symbol of concord.
3 Most probably, he is not identifiable because both the Roman divinities of prosperity were female: Venus and Abuntantia, both usually depicted holding a cornucopia, which is also painted in this card.
4 Seville 2016d: 47.
5 It should be noted that specific types of games were directly related to high politics. Let us for example think of the Olympic Games, which had an important political and military dimension, as their organization was related to the Olympic truce (see Kanin 1981).
6 Parlett 1999: 366; he presents briefly some games based on politics on pp. 366–367.
7 See for example Leupold 2004.
8 See Russo 2007: 257.
9 Jacobs 2012: 17.
10 Avedon & Sutton-Smith 2015/1971: 241.
11 See Avedon & Sutton-Smith 2015/1971: 240–241 and Parlett 1991: 44–45.
12 Whiting 1981: 40.
13 Walker 2007: 255.
14 Woods 2012: 57.
15 Lo 2007: 125; on the game see also Lo & Wang 2004.
16 See Kurke 1999. *Pessoi* is a more general ancient Greek term for board games, but it is logical to assume that the game Aristotle refers to is *Polis*.
17 See Van Creveld 2013: 251.
18 See Seville 2016a.
19 See https://www.ea.com/en-gb/games/simcity, visited 7 March 2020.
20 Burke 2005: 77–78.
21 See for example the *Royal Game of the Life of Henri IV* (Paris: Basset, ca1815), which "celebrates the Bourbon Restoration in France, which followed the fall of Napoleon in 1814 and continued until the July Revolution of 1830" (Seville 2016d: 94).
22 See Seville 2016d: 98–102 and 132–133.
23 Think for example of the game *The Chicken of Henry IV*, published in Paris in 1792, which bore elements of propaganda for the French constitutional monarchy. The title of the game is based on Henry IV (1553–1610) as a king who was so concerned with the wellbeing of his subjects that he did everything he could so that every French would have "the means to have a chicken in the pot on Sunday" (Seville 2016d: 44–46).
24 See for example the political messages included in geographical games based on the *Game of Goose* in Seville 2008. On map-based games see Seville 2008 (with useful bibliography) and Dove 2016.
25 See Townshend 1979: 794.
26 Bubczyk 2015: 26.
27 Bubczyk 2015: 25.
28 Bubczyk 2015: 26.
29 *Heimskringla or The Chronicle of the Kings of Norway. Saga of Sigurd the Crusader and His Brothers Eystein and Olaf*, retrieved from https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Heimskringla/Saga_of_Sigurd_the_Crusader_and_His_Brothers_Eystein_and_Olaf, on 6 March 2020.
30 Another interesting dimension of the text should not escape our attention. According to the saga, the Byzantines used the games as a means to predict the future: when the king is victorious in the Hippodrome, he will also win in battle. To the limit of my knowledge, this cannot be confirmed on the basis of Byzantine sources. Probably, this part of the texts reveals such a practice related to games in Scandinavia.

31 See Seville 2016c: 120–121. See also below, chapter 8, on the legend on chess and backgammon used in diplomacy between the Indian and the Persian king.
32 See Peterson 2012: 381–386.
33 See Weisbord 2017: 103–132; Cornelissen 2011; Mason 2007; Greig 2007.
34 See Goldsmith 1995 and D'Agati 2013.
35 Claus & Marriott 2012: 178.
36 See http://www.strikeboardgame.com/.
37 Koichi 2004: 212.
38 See Weisbord 2017: 75–102.
39 Elias & Dunning 1986: 23; their points are still timely.
40 See http://peoplepowergame.com/. The game was released by York Zimmerman Inc. in 2010; a second version was introduced in 2015.
41 See a review of the game in "Reading and Gaming for Justice", a blog presenting itself as "a blog on books and tabletop games focusing on social justice and diversity": https://gamingforjustice.com/2016/01/23/board-game-review-the-resistance/.
42 Arcangeli 2003: 73–88. On excessive gaming in the Renaissance see also Fischer 2017.
43 Yalom 2004: 8.
44 Bubczyk 2015: 31.
45 *Codex Theodosianus*, Book IX (Dealing with criminal law and procedure), translated by Fred H. Blume; retrieved from http://www.uwyo.edu/lawlib/blume-justinian/ajc-edition-2/books/book9/book9-1rev.pdf, on 7 March 2020). *Codex Justinianus* (the Code of Justinian), is the result of a codification of the Roman Law, undertaken by ten lawmakers under Justinian. It is one of the four collections of imperial laws that constituted the so-called *Corpus Iuris Civilis* (Body of Civil Law).
46 *Codex Theodosianus*, Book III, title XLIII: Concerning the game of dice and dice players (*De aleae lusu et aleaoribus*), translated by Fred H. Blume; retrieved from http://www.uwyo.edu/lawlib/blume-justinian/ajc-edition-2/books/book3/book%203-43rev.pdf, on 7 March 2020.
47 *The Digest*, book XI, title 5 (Concerning gamblers), translated by S. P. Scott 1932, volume IV; retrieved from http://droitromain.upmf-grenoble.fr/Anglica/D11_Scott.htm#V, on March 2020. The *Digest* is also part of Justinian's *Corpus Iuris Civilis*.
48 *The Digest*, book XXI, title 1 (Concerning the Edict of the Aediles), translated by S. P. Scott 1932, volume V; available at http://droitromain.upmf-grenoble.fr/Anglica/D21_Scott.htm, on 7 March 2020. Ulpian refers to Sextus Pomponius, a Roman lawyer who lived in the second century AD and the author of some 300 law books.
49 Novel 123 (Concerning various ecclesiastical topics), translated by Fred H. Blume; retrieved from http://www.uwyo.edu/lawlib/blume-justinian/ajc-edition-2/novels/121-140/novel%20123_replacement.pdf, on 7 March 2020.
50 Arcangeli 2003: 74.
51 See Arcangeli 2003: 75–76.
52 See Ortalli 1997: 109.
53 Arcangeli 2003: 80.
54 Arcangeli 2003: 80.
55 Arcangeli 2003: 81.
56 Arcangeli 2003: 81.
57 Ortalli 1997: 109. The following paragraphs on the gambler state are based exclusively on Ortalli's article.
58 Zollinger 2016: 9.
59 Ortalli 1997: 109.
60 Ortalli 2016: 33.
61 Ortalli 1997: passim.
62 Bose 1998: 179.
63 See Brewster 2015/1971b: 36.

6

GAMES OF METAPHYSICS

"Does God play dice?" From Albert Einstein to Stephen Hawking, great scientists have related metaphorically games of chance and the divine to speak about the utmost mysteries of the universe. But they were not the first to do so. Already in ancient India, one of the principal gods of Hinduism, Śiva (or Shiva) was very often presented in texts and visual arts as playing dice. In one of Hinduism's most celebrated myths, Śiva plays dice with his wife Parvati, a game that symbolizes the whole world.[1] Later, other natural religions included dicing in their mythology.[2]

The ancient Greek philosopher Plato went a step further. He did not only relate games and gaming to the divine, but he presented Socrates attributing the invention of board games to a god, namely the Egyptian god Thot, relating it thus to other discoveries attributed to the same deity: Writing, numeracy, and astronomy.[3] In his *Laws* (903c–e), Plato relates even the creation of the world to the ancient Greek strategy board game of *pessoi*, as he presents the creator of the world as playing the game when he places the souls in different bodies.[4]

Independently of whether gods play dice, or any other game, it is historically proven that religions did indeed "play" various games to promote their doctrines and/or their ethical rules[5]. They also fought against games, when they felt that gaming threatened the religious or social lives of players. It is not a coincidence that the king of Castille Alfonso X (1252–1284), a prolific player himself and a student of games, opens his *Libro de los juegos* (*Book of Games*, a collection of games that were played in Spain in his time) attributing the development of play and games to the divine providence.

> Because God wanted that man have every manner of happiness, in himself naturally, so that he could suffer the cares and troubles when they came to them, therefore men sought out many ways that they could have this

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> happiness completely. Wherefore they found and made many types of play and pieces with which to delight themselves.[6]

On the other side, games have included in their contents religious elements and doctrines, either to be more attractive to religious players or to be approved by the relevant religious or political authorities. In the world of digital games, the relationship between games and religion got a new dimension, including, among other things, a discussion on whether games could constitute new religions![7]

In various periods, humans have shown the tendency to relate the divine to the power of chance. It is not a coincidence that Johan Huizinga explains the relationship between play and the metaphysical world exactly by pointing to the almost sacred dimension of luck and fate. As fate is almost equally unpredictable and all-mighty as the divine, the intellectual relation between its kingdom and any divine kingdom is almost unavoidable.[8]

Games have been related to metaphysics in a variety of ways. Studying *Mancala* in Africa for example, Philip Townshend speaks about prohibitions of playing the game in specific circumstances, in which it might threat the wellbeing of the community. What is important for our purpose is that he speaks about these prohibitions as followed by "dire supernatural sanctions", which would of course make the regulations more applicable.[9] Referring to games of the *Mancala* family, Irving Finkel notes that they "have been plausibly seen ultimately to embody ritual in symbolizing the planting of seed".[10]

To get to a period even older, we may refer to ancient India, where the swing becomes a religious metaphor explaining the function of the universe and connecting heaven to earth. Roger Caillois writes that in Vedic India, swings were related to sacrifices and the trajectory of the swing was thought as a virtual bridge between heaven and earth, and as related to the renewal of nature. He also notes that gods like Krishna and Kama, the Indian god of love, were imagined as swinging.[11]

As mentioned above, religions used, directly and indirectly, games as teaching tools to promote their doctrines and principles. Some of these religions, or at least some of their members, even related games to their origin myths. A fifteenth-century author for example relates the invention of chess to Adam and his need to comfort himself after the death of Abel. He also includes in the list of chess players prominent biblical figures such as Shem, Japhet and King Solomon.[12] Even if it is logical to assume that the author simply wanted to promote chess or to neutralize the negative attitude of the Church towards the game, the connection of the game to the Old Testament and the beliefs on the first steps of humanity is intriguing.

In other cases, religious or ritual changes influenced the development of games. Modern scholars have related the introduction of the chess queen to the board to the cult of the Virgin Mary, namely to the period when Mary became more central in Christian theology and ritual practices. Norman Rider for example writes that it is probably not a coincidence that the replacement of the vizier

with the queen from the twelfth century onwards comes in the same period or right after Mary's glorification by the Church.[13]

Religion has also been reflected in countless games of all kinds. In Antiquity, games were understood as entertainment of the gods (see for example the case of the gladiatorial games in Chapter 7 and recall the case of the Olympic games referred to in Chapter 3). A number of other games were symbolically related to the heavens or the underworld, as for example the Egyptian *Senet* and the Indian *Snakes & Ladders* (I will refer to both of them in the following sections of this chapter). Still more games, in various periods, incorporated religious messages. To limit myself to a European game reflecting a Christian metaphor, I might illustrate by referring to the board of a *Game of the Goose* produced in Orléans around 1750, in which the goose in square 63 is depicted feeding two smaller geese, in a motif and form reminding the hymnographic metaphor of Christ as pelican that feeds its young with its own blood[14].

But this is just the one side of the coin. On the other side, the historian finds religious scepticism, or even hostility, towards games and gaming. In various historical periods, modern times included, religious authorities banned or restricted gaming, which was evaluated as a sin, put in some periods on the same level as avarice, usury, or blasphemy (to which it was supposed to be associated). The main reasons for that, as we have seen, were related to the games absorbing the players and keeping them away from professional, social and religious duties and activities, as well as to the destructing potentiality of gambling that went often hand in hand with games of chance. Another reason may be added here: there were games, or game equipment, that in various periods were related to the metaphysical world through occultist activities.

We will study the relationship between games and the supernatural world in the relevant section of the chapter, focusing mainly to the cards of *Tarot*. But first we will get back to ancient Egypt, to see how the board game *Senet* was related to the life of the soul and its adversities in afterlife.

Games, death and the soul in ancient times

Senet, known also as *Senat,* is an ancient Egyptian board race game at least five thousand years old. Its board consisted of thirty squares divided into three rows of ten. It was played by two players. We are not sure about the rules of the game but most scholars who studied it believe that the board was a linear path from a beginning common to both opponents to a common end. The path had a boustrophedon form, most probably as a reversed S. Five of the squares featured hieroglyphic symbols and usually were differently decorated than the rest; they are supposed to be the final squares of the track. Both players had the same number of pieces (in the Old and Middle Kingdoms seven, in the New Kingdom five) and the aim of the game was to be the first who get all pieces to the end of the track, removing them thus from the board. The movement of pieces was decided by the cast of four binary lots (semi cylindrical sticks with one face flat and the

other rounded), bones (called *astragali*) or a teetotum. Some of the squares were loaded with meaning, as for example square 15 which symbolized the "house of rebirth", or square 27 which sent the player back to rebirth. As boards of various material and quality have been found, it is established that *Senet* was a game popular to all social strata of the Egyptian society.[15]

Peter Piccione writes that the game had two versions, one secular, played as any other game for recreation, and one religious, performed as a means of communication with the dead and spiritual renewal of the soul.[16] His thesis on the metaphysical use of the game is based on the decoration of boards, which consists solely of religious symbols (gods and concepts related to them), as well as lunar and astronomical symbols and concepts. The five last squares of the board were related to the divine and their decoration was inspired by that. This shows that at least in this period the game had a religious dimension and function.[17]

Furthermore, *Senet* was associated with the *Book of the Dead* and got in time related to the resurrection of the *ba*, the Egyprian notion of soul. Piccione notes that such a spiritual and ritual dimension of the game is at least four thousand years old. Archaeological findings indicate that already in the first and second dynasties games were placed in the tombs of the deceased, among other objects to be used in afterlife. This should be evaluated in the light of the Egyptian ritual mentality, in which games and sports were central elements of religious celebrations and worship.

In a number of ancient paintings, players are depicted as playing with invisible opponents and the game symbolizes in this way a bridge between the world of the living and that of the dead. This bridging is also presented in texts coming from the twelfth dynasty. In itself, this motif shows that the game was by then understood as having a religious and ritual dimension. These depictions also witness on the well-known Egyptian notion of the possibility for direct communication and contact between the living and the deceased, as well as for the freedom of the dead's spirit, that could visit earth to play *Senet* with a still living opponent. Ancient sources show that it was also possible for a living person to play *Senet* against her/his own soul.[18]

During the twentieth dynasty, Egyptians related the game to the nocturnal passage of god Re from the underworld, before being reborn next morning as a sun god. The board symbolized the difficulties and dangers Ra was going through every night in the Netherworld. For the player, getting her/his pieces from square 1 to square 30 was symbolising the dangers of getting through the world of the dead. Piccione has noticed that *Senet* became a ritual for spiritual renewal and that a living person could start his preparation for her/his spiritual life in the hereafter by performing the game, or playing the ritual, while already alive.[19]

Taking all these elements into consideration, I may claim that the name of the game, which may be translated as "passing" or "passage", probably does not only reflect the playing practice of surpassing the pieces of the opponent but it may have a metaphysical dimension as well. Reflecting on this dimension, we may recall that the Jewish Passover and the Greek and Latin word for Easter,

namely *Pascha*, derive from the Aramaic *Paskha*, which signifies a passing (the liberation of the Israelites from exactly Egypt).

Senet was not the only game with religious associations in ancient Egypt. Closely related to it, at least in tomb murals, was the game of *Mehen*, also known as the game of the serpent. Timothy Kendall claims that the game got from at least the Old Kingdom a religious dimension related to the myths of the creation of the world. He also identifies elements of magic in the decoration of *Mehen* boards which most probably did not have something to do with the gameplay. The game was of course related to the homonymous deity but the evidence at disposition is not enough to tell whether it is the game that originated in the deity or the other way around.[20]

Staying in the realms of death and the soul, we may have a look on the phenomenon of board games placed in ancient tombs in various areas and periods. In an article published in 2004, Helène Whittaker studies board games as expressions of funeral symbolism in ancient Greece and Rome, taking into consideration more cases from other parts of the world. She is one of many scholars who have suggested that Greeks and Romans saw the playing of board games as a metaphor related to life and death. One of her main claims is that this conception was a cross-cultural phenomenon in ancient times. She exemplifies by referring to *Senet*, various games of the *Mancala* family distributed in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, and board games found in Iron Age Scandinavian tombs.[21]

The correlation of board games and death is a phenomenon that is not limited to the ancient times. Historical sources demonstrate that it was at least equally widespread in the medieval period. Let us for example recall a fifteenth-century Scandinavian depiction of a man playing chess with no other than Death in person, found in the Swedish church of Täby (1480 AD). The artist, Albertus Pictor, shows the man most probably losing this game of life and death.[22]

Approaching life and death as games and using games as symbolic arenas of life and afterlife is a study subject that could produce very charming historical game studies. The mystery of the unknown has fascinated people in every period, both in their real life but also when leaning over a game board or holding various types of playing cards. This mystery was related to how chance and/or unexpected difficulties, incarnated in gameplay in the opposite's strategy and movements, would influence the future and life in general. The unexpected and unknown has always been an enemy. And many people tried to face it by surmising the content of the future. In the occult world of divination, games and mostly game equipment were to become tools for telling the future, as well as for seeking esoteric wisdom.

Games and the occult

This section focuses on games and game equipment that was used in various periods as a media of the occult. In modern times, telling the future (as well as contacting the souls of the deceased) is mostly related to cards. But in most historical

periods, divination was related to the use of dice, *astragali*, sticks or teetotums, or games based on the throwing of such equipment. For the ancient Romans for example winning at the game of *alea* was supposed to be an omen of rule.[23] In Antiquity, but not only, the interpretation of the throw of dice was a common practice for divination in formal oracles.[24]

Since the eighteenth century, the most celebrated divination game equipment (not only in practice but also in relevant publications) has been the tarot pack. Before proceeding to a short presentation of the history of the game and its later relation to the occult, I would like to underline that the tarot cards were not invented as a means of fortune-telling and divination but as an exciting card game that is still played in many places, mainly in Europe.[25]

The question on the symbolic meaning of the tarot triumph cards (known as Major Arcana) and its sequence has bothered thousands of minds. Michael Dummett is confident that, independent of whether the inventor of the triumph cards had a special meaning in mind or not, this meaning was soon forgotten, as it did not have any significance for the players of the tarot games. To support his thesis, he argues on the basis of the numerous variations that were produced in various places and periods.[26]

Despite the widespread belief that the tarot cards have their roots in the deep past of India or Egypt, in fact they are a European cultural product. To trace their date of origin is almost impossible, but it seems that they were invented in Italy in the first third of the fifteenth century.[27] It is claimed that they were at first restricted to the higher strata of the society, the main argument for that being the high value of the cards, which had to be hand-painted. From Italy, tarot was spread to France, Switzerland and then to other European countries.[28]

Let me now turn to the perception of the tarot games in the past. More often than not, tarot was treated the same way as all other games of chance. This means that it was prohibited or restricted in various periods and places. But there are also cases in which it was accepted from such prohibition (in some cases along with backgammon and chess). Dummett refers to such exceptions in the cities of Brescia in 1488, Salo in 1489, Bergamo in 1491 and Reggio nell'Emilia in 1500.[29]

After more than three centuries of pure use as game equipment, tarots were related to cartomancy in the eighteenth century.[30] Dummett notes that one of the main reasons why playing cards would not be used on the occult world earlier was that during the Renaissance magic was taken by scholars and others very seriously as a coherent intellectual system, in other words retaining pretensions to intellectual respectability. As a result, no one would even think of using playing cards for divination or magic.[31]

Dummett has studied the relation of tarot to the occult and he has traced its origin to the work of Court de Gébelin (1719–1784). He also studies this relation in the work of de Gébelin's disciples and followers in France, Britain and other European countries, and he pays special attention to the legend relating tarot and its occultist use with the gypsies. Let us underline some of his main points.[32] Court de Gébelin identified the triumph cards as bearing symbols of the ancient

Egyptian religion. This demonstrated, he believed, that tarot was invented in remote antiquity by ancient Egyptian priests and contained symbolic representations of their doctrine. This is why he changed the names of some of the cards, giving them new mystical identities[33]. This is something that was to be followed by many other occultists.

De Gébelin refers to a previous author, Comte de M★★★, who was the first to relate tarot to fortune-telling, ascribing this practice to the ancient Egyptians. His ascription, which was not escorted by any historical evidence, became common place in the world of occultists ever since. He was also the first to have proposed a method for tarot divination, supposedly a reconstruction of the old Egyptian one, and to have associated tarot divination with the gypsies, who supposedly introduced both the cards and its use for fortune-telling to Europe, themselves adopting them in Egypt, on their way from India to Europe. The legend that was formed after de M★★★, claimed that tarots were not originally playing cards, but pages of a mystical book, usually referred to as the book of Thot, or keys to magical symbolism and secret wisdom.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the first tarot packs especially designed and produced for cartomancy appeared in France.[34] At more or less the same time, tarot cartomancy societies were established. These societies got in time the typical attributes of sacred orders of the period: Initiation of members and division of them into hierarchic grades, which were supposed to have access to different grades of secrets and wisdom. The spiritual progress of the members was in some cases related to the sequence of the cards in the major Arcana.

In time, the circle of people associating tarot with the occult was enlarged, while at the same time the use of tarot games for recreation was reduced. Books and pamphlets presenting various explanations of the symbolism behind the tarots, mainly the cards of the major Arcana, and various methods for tarot divination flourished. Tarot and its mystical dimension were related by different authors and occultists to the Hermetic tradition, the Cabbala, alchemy, magical and astrological doctrines, and even tarot packs and methods of divination having a biblical background appeared. For some of them, tarot cards would primarily be used for divination, for others they were to reveal deeper cosmic truth and secrets.

Dummett points to a striking common element in the writings of occultists concerning the tarot cards, namely "their complete indifference to any genuine historical evidence". He adds that "the most notable example […] is the connection which they came to maintain between the Tarot pack and the Gypsies".[35] On the basis of various sources, he shows that this connection, which became a kind of a dogma for the occultists and "common knowledge" outside the occultist circles, is far from true. In fact, gypsies' fortune-telling was based on palmistry. Dummett writes that there is no evidence, not only about gypsies telling fortune with tarot cards but even about them playing any kind of cards before the twentieth century.[36]

The occultist use of tarot cards is a case of using a game equipment for divination, fortune-telling or esoteric spiritualism. But the relationship of games to these activities is not simply related to the use of equipment. In various historical periods games have also been used to serve similar purposes. In the following paragraphs I will present briefly two such cases, the first related to the oldest board game surviving and the second to a Chinese game that has become an international success, namely the *Royal Game of Ur* and the board game *Go*.

Let me start with the *Royal Game of Ur*, a five thousand years old board game, whose only surviving set is treasured today at the British Museum.[37] It was a displacement race game played by two opponents who had seven pieces each, based on the throw of four pyramid-like dice (tetrahedrons) or four-sided sticks. The player who removes first all her/his pieces from the board wins. The board has twenty squares divided into three rows. Each side row belongs to one of the players while the middle one is a common area for both players. Its gameplay demands a combination of chance and skill, as the pieces of the two opponents can remove the pieces of the other player from the board if they land on a square occupied by an opponent piece (in such a case the piece is not eliminated but sent back to the beginning).

Studying complementarily textual and visual information on the game and textual evidence on Babylonian omens, modern scholars noticed something very interesting: That the number of squares on the game board (twenty) corresponds to the number of the standard questions that were asked in Mesopotamian liver divination and the number of the parts of the liver that were always examined in such a practice. This led to a thesis on the game being related to divination. An extra argument comes from archaeological findings which show that the outcome of the examination of the liver and the omens were abstracted by the priests into a grid that was very similar to the grid of the board of the game. Furthermore, the decoration of Mesopotamian boards of the game of Ur shows similarities to symbols found in clay models of liver that were used to train young priests and diviners. Finally, Mesopotamian clay tablets witnessing on the game include phrases related to specific squares of the board that could be used for fortune-telling. So, all these pieces of evidence taken into consideration, it is now believed that the *Royal Game of Ur* was related to an elaborated form of Babylonian liver divination.[38]

Let us now move from Mesopotamia to China to consider the ancient board game *Go*, originally called *weiqi*, still played today around the world. *Go* is a game of pure strategy played between two opponents in a board of 19x19 lines with 181 black and 180 white "stones". Ancient Chinese legends relate the game to calendar-making, divination and the cosmic powers. One connection between the game and divination was based on the fact that the ancient Chinese magic squares, which were supposed to reveal the future, were always depicted in the same way as *Go* diagrams. An additional argument is related to the fact that the ancient Chinese historian Ban Gu (32–92 AD) wrote that the board of *Go* represents the laws of the earth, the straight lines represent the divine virtues and the black and white stones represent the cosmic forces yin and yang. All in all, he wrote, the game is a model of the heavens.[39] Even if the use of *Go* for divination

should be examined more thoroughly, the relation between a strategy game and foretelling the future is indeed very intriguing for any historian.

Let me close the examples presented by getting back to the period when the tarot cards were invented, the fifteenth and sixteenth century. In this period, card and board games were related in Italy to divination through the so-called fortune book games. Fortune book games were a combination of astrological guides and dice games, in which the players asked something related to their future and then they threw dice or drew tarots, according to which they would find an answer in the books. On the basis of these books, board games with the same function were published later, as for example the *Game of Loading the Donkey* (Giovanni Antonio de Paoli, Rome, 1589–1599) or *The Game of Plucking the Owl* (Ambrogio Brambilla, 1589).[40]

To sum up, various games and game equipment were used in various periods in relation to the occult. This was of course something that the three monotheistic religions and many secular authorities would never accept. It is logical to assume that this use of games was one of the reasons for the negative reactions of religious and political leaders towards games from the medieval times onwards. Some of these reactions are already mentioned in the previous chapters and some more will be presented below. But first, we will see how games were used in different periods as didactic tools to teach metaphysical doctrines. We will start with a game still played today, the board game of *Snakes and Ladders*.

Games as religious didactic tools

Snakes and Ladders (also known as *Chutes and Ladders*) is today a secular game of chance, played all over the world.[41] But despite the popularity of the game, only few people know that it is an ancient game that has a strong metaphysical dimension. Its content, as well as its board, was different than what it is today. To quote a modern scholar:

> Snakes and Ladders is a traditional Indian board game of considerable antiquity and profundity. Its theme is the spiritual quest for liberation from the vicissitudes of karma or the hindrances of the passions. […] Pilgrim-like, each player progresses fitfully from states of vice, illusion, karmic impediment, or inferior birth at the base of the playing area to ever higher states of virtue, spiritual advancement, the heavenly realms, and (in the ultimate, winning square) liberation (*mokṣa*) or union with the supreme deity. Known by different regional names, the game was formerly played throughout much of North India as *gyān caupaṛ* ("chaupar of knowledge or gnosis") or *gyān hāzī* ("game knowledge"), in Nepal as *nāgapāsā* ("snake-dice"), and in Maharashtra as *mokṣapaṭa* ("cloth or board of liberation").[42]

Let us start with the game as it is played today. The rules of the game are simple. The board is divided into a number of squares (in modern times, the board has

usually 100, but in the past, there existed board with 72, 81, 84, 100, 124, 342 or 360 squares[43]). Snakes and ladders are painted on the board, connecting squares between them. The heads of the snakes are always to be found on a higher row of the board than their tails. All players start from square 1 and the one who reaches first square 100 wins the game. The throw of a dice decides how many squares a player will move. If a player lands on a square hosting the head of a snake, s/he has to slide down to the square hosting the tail of the snake. Landing on a square hosting the bottom of a ladder gives the player the possibility to climb the ladder and end up on its top, avoiding all snakes in between (landing on the top of the ladder is neutral, it does not have any implications for the player).

There are various theses on the origins of the game, and it is not my intension to discuss them. All of them relate the game to the world of Hinduism in ancient India. There were, of course, various versions of the game. And it was not called *Snakes and Ladders*. Not all versions included snakes and/or ladders.[44] Most probably, similar games were played in various places in the area, having different names and slightly different boards. Equally obscure is the temporal origin of the game.[45]

Studying various boards from the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Andrew Topsfield has pointed out that in the previous versions of the game, the jainist versions in particular, "the snakes in general represent the spiritual defilements which hinder the soul in its long upward journey from the various hells or the condition of the *nigodas*, the very lowest form of life, to the heavens and ultimate liberation".[46]

Deepak Shimkhada studied the Nepalese version of the game, on the basis on two boards, one in the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago (late 18th c.) and the other in the Nepal National Museum of Kathmandu (early 19th c.). He also compared the Nepalese game to the Indian *Game of Self-Knowledge* and the Tibetan *Game of Liberation*.[47] One of his points is that the *Nāgapāśa*, as the game was known in Nepal, was supposed to measure the karma of the players. He also notes that "the squares are apparently supposed to represent the realms of gods or levels of consciousness, elements of nature, and qualities of human beings; and the human figures are the embodiment of that nature which each square represents." Each of the horizontal rows of the board represents a level of human consciousness, in the following hierarchical order from bottom to top: (a) human existence, (b) fantasy, (c) karma, (d) balance, (e) human consciousness, (f) knowledge, (g) reality, and finally (h) the realm of gods. At the top of the boards the divine figures of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva symbolize the Buddhist paradise.[48]

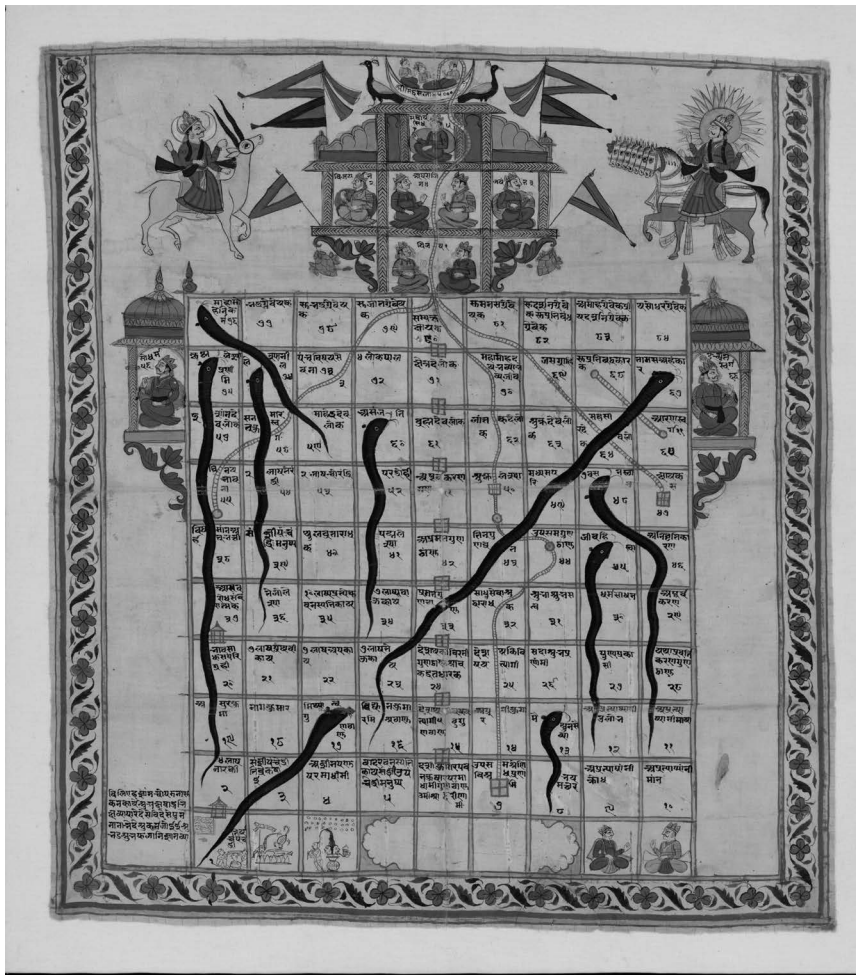
Despite the different local variations, the main principles of the game were the same. The main aim was to reach enlightenment, nirvana, or the divine kingdom of one of the principal divinities of the area. The board symbolized the universe in which the player had to fight against cosmic powers and unfold the best of her/himself to reach the final goal. As the game was based on chance, karma was the main force that decided on the outcome of the game. In her/his path the player had to get through squares that represented various vices and virtues.

This is in fact the main difference between the original form and aim of the game and its present secularized version. Today, the squares are just numbered from 1 to 100 (or any other number that represents the end). In the past, each square represented either a vice or a virtue inscribed in it. This is exactly what made the game a medium of religious or social indoctrination. The most dangerous vices, i.e. those evaluated most negatively by the religious, political or social authorities, were placed in the heads of snakes and they would lead the player back to previous "levels" of life, in other words squares also identified as vices. On the contrary, important virtues were placed in the bottom of ladders. Landing on them, which symbolized exercising them in life, would lead the player to higher levels of life and closer to the final aim, whatever that might be.[49] By playing the game, the players, children in particular, got an introduction to spiritual and social life.

Let me illustrate by using the example of a nineteenth-century board which reflects the ancient principles of the game. It is treasured in Victoria and Albert Museum (acc. no. Circ. 324-1972) and its inscriptions present various snake-vices and ladder-virtues. The vices related to snakes are lust (square 13), lack of insight (17), the most defiled of the "shades" of the soul (74), and the darkest of all "shades" of the soul (75), while the final snake (76) is the so-called *mohanīya-karma*, i.e. the residual karmas which cause the soul to become confused and desirous. Some of the virtues related to ladders are exactly those presented in Jain doctrine as needed to fight the specific vices: the karmic suppression (bottom of ladder on squares 7 and 44) and obliteration (47).[50]

Another illustrating example is a Muslim version of the game, now in the Royal Asiatic Society in London. It is a 10x10 squares board inscribed in Persian with names of virtues, vices and spiritual conditions, most of them translated into English. It is a game of social and religious teaching, influenced by the Sufi doctrines. The vice pride (91) for example leads to violence (18), while Satan (100) is directly related through a snake to lust (10). On the contrary, certainties (48) result to peace (54), being a master of knowledge (69) leads to the truth of Islam (94) and extinction in Allah (84) leads to the throne of Allah in the winning square of the board.[51]

Vices and virtues were in modern times adapted to the ethics of the nineteenth and the twentieth century and the relevant sociocultural environments who produced and/or played the game. The educational dimension of the game was in some cases strengthened by illustrations depicting some of the vices and the virtues mentioned in the board.[52] See for example the early twentieth-century American board published by Botermans: Sympathy (3) promotes to love (37), unity (6) to strength (16), patience (14) to attainment (32), courage (27) to reward (56), generosity (39) to gratitude (44), thrift (41) to fulfilment (85; this is the longest ladder), industry (69) to success (87), penitence (79) to grace (98), and confession (89) to forgiveness (91). On the other hand, illdoing (15) demotes to trouble (9), pugnacity (42) to pain (17), conceit (49) to friendlessness (12), disobedience (58) to disgrace (45), temper (61) to regret (22), mischief (75) to woe (47), indulgence (88) to illness (36; this is the longest snake), indolence (94) to poverty (64), and dishonesty (97) to punishment (65).[53]



Snakes and Ladders, watercolour on cloth, India, late nineteenth century. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Another intriguing element is found in an early nineteenth-century board treasured in the Collection of Kumar Sangram Singh of Nawalgarh in Jaipur. In this board, egoism (square 55, head of a snake) leads back to birth (square 1, tail of the snake) so that the player is reborn to a new life, in other words s/he is given a new chance to reach the divine.[54] If this is a remnant from much older versions of the game, could it mean that some versions of the game were also introducing, consciously or not, to reincarnation? This daring working question, which has to be studied more thoroughly, could be strengthened by the existence of spiral boards, in which every new circle could symbolize a new life.[55] We may take a further step by claiming that in some modern linear boards, horizontal rows play the role circles played in the past, as each row represents a level of life, of even a life circle.[56]

Issues that a historian might examine further in relation to the game and in dialogue with other disciplines, as for example social, cultural and religious studies, might be: (a) The snake and the ladder as religious symbols, which are to be found in various religious systems and mythologies, from Ophism, to Jainism and Hinduism, to Christianity and many other.[57] (b) The collection of vices and virtues included in the game in various period and places. (c) The secularization of the game and its reasons. (d) The replacement of the spiral board with the rectangular and linear one.[58] Could this be the result of the Christian world view that would not accept neither reincarnation nor a cyclical perception of time? (e) The content of the paintings (deities and personifications of vices and virtues) that decorate the boards in the modern versions of the game (18th–20th c.) and their religious, social, gender and cultural background and symbolisms.[59] (f) Various symbolic dimensions of the game in various periods, as for example the symbolic dimension of numerology. Is it by chance for example that the most common boards in the Indian world have 72 squares, given that 72 as a number has a special meaning in Buddhism? Or that in our western world the most common boards have one hundred squares, the number 100 being the result of the multiplication of the principal number 10 by itself?

Approached this way, *Snakes and Ladders* might be understood as a didactic religious tool that was in the passage of time transformed into a didactic socio-cultural tool. It was neither the first nor the last game to be used so. In various periods, individuals and collective entities used play and games as references to religious ideas and principles. In medieval times for example, "readers and poets could use popular ludic pastimes to reflect on deeper spiritual issues, just as people today use lyrics and out-of-context phrases to create online memes".[60]

Even very simple games, as for example hopscotch, were used as illustrative examples to introduce to religious and spiritual issues. Studying hopscotch, Roger Caillois writes that in ancient times, it was presented as a labyrinth, in which the player was moving a stone representing his own soul, trying to find the ideal exit. Later, writes the French sociologist and philosopher, Christian ideas influenced the game, whose design took the form of a basilica, the main architectural form of a Christian church. Since then, the final goal was to place the stone into the apse of the basilica-like hopscotch grid, which symbolized the soul reaching paradise.[61]

Another way of using games as didactic tools was by including religious symbols in games and game equipment. I have mentioned above the introduction of Christian symbols to the tarot pack. Various other religious symbols were also included in various versions of the tarots, as for example ancient Egyptian or satanic symbols. Let us also recall orbs and scepters hold by kings in the regular 52-cards pack, topped by the Christian cross or the Muslim combination of star and crescent.

We know also of cases, when representatives of the church used games for moral purposes. An example of that is the Bishop of Cambray in Northern France, who in around 1000 AD invented a game called *Ludus Regularis Seu Clericalis* (*A game suitable for clerics*). The game was based on the correspondence between the 56 possible numeric combinations of dice throws and a set of

56 virtues. By trying to create, through the throwing of the dice, a pair of virtues with the highest score, the players were introduced to the importance of virtues and their hierarchy. The game was also aiming at opening or maintaining relevant ethical discussions between the players.[62]

Finally, it should be noted that there were also cases, when games were used to communicate negative perceptions against the Church. In an eighteenth-century case, members of the Jansenist heresy produced a game to demonstrate against their condemnation by Pope Clement XI in 1713. The game, under the title *The Game of the Constitution* (*Le Jeu de la Constitution sur l'air du Branle de mets*, Paris[?], ca 1721), was designed after the famous and popular *Game of the Goose*. It aimed at mocking and challenging the authority of the Church in general and Pope Clement XI in particular. The pope himself was illustrated as a skeleton in the death space of the board.[63]

Religious reactions to games and gaming

The task of studying the reaction of religions to games in Antiquity is quite difficult, due to the lack of sources dedicated to that. Things get much easier when it comes to the medieval times. A number of sources related to Christianity and Islam, show that the main problem for the religious authorities seems to have been that games prevented the faithful from their daily obligations and activities. As we have seen above, another important reason was the relationship between gaming and gambling, a habit that could destroy the player's spiritual, as well as social, life. In the following pages I am focusing on Christian reactions to games and gaming, but a similar study of other religions would be indeed very interesting.

Let us start by throwing a glance at fifteenth-century Europe. Our first piece of evidence is related to the games getting the attention of the players away from their religious duties. A worried father expressed that in just a few words writing to his son: "Now at tables, now at chess, well often and failing at the mass".[64] Another relevant source is the late-fifteenth-century Franciscan preacher, the Milanese Michele Carcano, who evaluated games by applying a threefold categorization that was used in various areas and subjects and was rather popular during the fifteenth and early sixteenth century: He speaks of divine, human and diabolic games. It is not difficult to assume that games of chance were among those who were categorized as diabolic, something confirmed by a number of original sources.[65]

A number of times, the negative ecclesiastical approach to games were incorporated in events of clear condemnation. The fifteenth century witnessed to at least three such events. In 1423 in Bologna, thousands of cards were burned officially by the inhabitants of the city, after a condemning preach by the Franciscan priest and later canonized by the Catholic Church as saint Bernardino of Sienna (1380–1444), a famous polemist of gambling. According to a French contemporary source, in 1429 in Paris, after a similarly condemning sermon by a friar, over a hundred fires were alight in which people burned "chess and backgammon boards, dice, cards, balls and sticks, merels and every kind of covetous game

which can give rise to anger and swearing".[66] In 1452 in Nuremberg, another Franciscan priest, theologian and inquisitor who was also later canonized as a saint, Giovanni da Capistrano (1386–1456), was the initiator of another bonfire, in which 76 sledges, 3,640 backgammon boards, 40,000 dice, and an equal number of cards were burned.[67] Giacomo della Marca preaching on *De Ludo* in 1469 attributed the invention of games to no other than the devil himself.[68]

This was a continuation of a negative evaluation of games by ecclesiastic figures that preexisted. Various ecclesiastics had earlier included games in prohibited activities. Let us recall for example the Czech theologian Jan Hus (1370–1415) who composed a list of activities a Christian should avoid as reproachable. The list included dice, chess, and tables together with sins as gluttony, drunkenness, obscenity, courtship, dance, or avaricious trading.[69]

The negative reaction of the church towards games and gaming has not been limited to games of chance, as one may easily think. Even games of strategy, as for example chess, have suffered condemnation, restriction and prohibition by religious authorities. Let us have a closer look on that. In medieval times, most members of the clergy, monks in particular, shared a clearly negative notion of chess and playing chess. We may, by way of example, consider a letter of the Cardinal-Bishop of Ostia, Petrus Damiani, to pope Alexander II, datable to 1061–1062, which speaks of the "madness of dice and chess" and the "vanity of chess" and evaluates the game as an "impious sport, especially when canonic authority decrees that Bishops who are dice-players are to be deposed".[70]

But why were clerics negative to chess? An important reason is mentioned in Damiani's letter. It is clear from the text that chess was in this case played with the assistance of dice, something we also know from other sources. Harold Murray writes that the Muslims used dice to play a specific version of chess in the ninth century and that we also know that chess was played with dice in Europe not long after Damiani's time[71], as witnessed by Alfonso's *Book of Games* (see Chapter 3).

Apart from gambling and the related problems, Robert Bubczyk has related the negative reactions of the Church to two more possible reasons. The first is that chess was originally a game played by Muslims. The second is that as a sophisticated game that demanded intellectual skills, chess could easily initiate discussions on the advantage of faith over mind. Bubczyk claims further that the negative attitude of the Church towards games was crystalized in the twelfth century and that it should be contextualized on the basis of social and economic changes that characterize the period. The first point that should be taken into consideration is the very fact that chess and other board games gained popularity. At the same time, commodity-monetary economy was intensified, something that created cash-flows that resulted in the increase of gambling. The simultaneous decrease of interest for the Church and religious activities was the third ingredient on the mixture. Furthermore, Bubczyk claims that gaming became in this period the new arena for the traditional conflict of values between the Church and the aristocracy. The result could be no other than a rigorous Church reaction towards games.[72]

The prohibition of gaming also took the form of synodical rules. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) issued a canon prohibiting the clergy not only to play games of chance, but also to observe others playing them. A local synod in England, the Synod of Worchester, issued in 1240 a rule dictating that both dice and chess were forbidden to the members of the clergy. Some years later, in January 1281, the Archbishop of Canterbury condemned the monks in the monastery of Coxford for playing chess and declared that "the game of chess and other clownish entertainments will be forbidden forever". He also warned about the consequences. Disobedient monks would be suspended from the right to enter the church and perform any ritual or monastic duty, unless they fasted for three days on just bread and water. In the middle of the fourteenth century, consequences were extended not only to those playing but also on the spectator of games. The synod of Ely in England issued in 1364 banned playing chess and dice. What is noticeable is that the ban included spending time in the proximity of those who played these games.[73] We have every reason to believe that such rules were not the exception.

A number of ecclesiastical texts also tried to prevent the faithful from gaming by relating games to low ethics and acts of disaster. In some of these texts, legal issues are also taken up. Alessandro Arcangeli refers to such a case, the book *Palamedes*, written by the Protestant Daniel Souter and printed in Leiden in 1622. The title of the book recalls the ancient Greek hero Palamedes, who according to the myth invented dice and board games during the siege of Troy to help his co-warriors spend their free time. After a presentation of various games, Souter proceeds to a moral evaluation of games and a presentation of restrictions on games of chance from Antiquity to his own times. What is interesting is that he claims that these restrictions were already there before Christianity, which simply reinforced the negative evaluation of games by ancient pagans.[74]

The criticism of the Church towards games had indeed social and political results. As the Church had an influence in society, political authorities adopted ecclesiastical laws and rules as civil legislation, on state or local level. Political authorities had of course their own reasons for banning games of chance, as they could result in social turbulence. Dice and tables were the usual targets, but chess was very often included in the prohibited games.[75]

It should be noted though that despite criticism and bans against games by the ecclesiastical authorities, playing games remained one of the favorite pastimes not only among the laity but also for representatives of the clergy.[76] There were also some rare cases, when clerics were indirectly or directly, and sometimes heavily, involved in gaming and gambling enterprises.[77] This is most probably a result of the fact that a number of the members of the high clergy were educated aristocrats who were familiar both with playing chess and other games and with gambling.

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Summing up, I may claim that the relation of games to religion and metaphysics might be divided into, and be studied according to, the following areas:

(a) Didactic use of games to introduce or promote religious doctrines, rules and principles. This use was sometimes direct and sometimes indirect, even hidden in symbols included in cards, boards, figures, the nomenclature, and rules of games. In some cases, it got a secularized social dimension and content. (b) Religious reactions towards games and gaming. These reactions were more often than not negative, but there are cases where religious authorities embraced games, or at least they were neutral towards them. (c) Use of game equipment in relation to supernatural activities, mainly in relation to divination and contact with various kinds of spirits. The consideration of all these areas or any of them in particular, may shed extra light in the study of the relevant historical entities, not only in relation to their religious history, but also in regards with their sociocultural development.

Closing, I would like to underline that independently of whether gods have played dice or not, Clio, the ancient Greek muse of history seems to have played all types of games for thousands of years. Probably it is the time for her to be the central figure or at least the title, for a history-based game?

NOTES

1 See Handelman, Shulman & Berkson 1997.
2 See Huizinga 1949: 56–57.
3 Whittaker 2004: 297, referring to Plato, *Phaedrus*, 274D1. This association shows something about the appreciation of board games by the ancient Greeks, who conceived them as a cultural element of similar value to literacy, numeracy and astronomy. A similar legend attributed the invention of *alea* to the Homeric warrior Palamedes, who was also supposed to have invented numbers, military tactics, and the alphabet (see Purcell 1995: 28 and Kurke 1999: 249–250).
4 In ancient Greek metaphysical thinking, it was not only the gods who played dice or games. The pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus (6th–5th c. BC) in a celebrated passage presents Time (*aeon*) as a child playing *pessoi* (Fragm. B 52).
5 It should be noted from the beginning that this chapter will study neither the relationship between sports and religion nor digital games and religion. Bibliography abounds for both these areas; see for example Ellis 2014 and Campbell & Grieve 2014.
6 Musser Golladay 2005: 1.
7 See Campbell & Grieve 2014, particularly Anthony 2014.
8 See Huizinga 1949: 56.
9 See Townshend 1979: 795.
10 Finkel 2007a: 2.
11 See Caillois 2001: 60.
12 See Murray 1969/1913: 219. Murray presents various legends and theories related to the invention of chess, some of them of religious character.
13 Reider 2015/1959: 443; cf. Yalom 2004: 107–121.
14 Seville 2016d: 27–28.
15 On the game, its rules and tactics, and a short introduction to its history, see Piccione 2007; Parlett 1999: 66–68; Botermans 2007: 163–172. According to Piccione 2007: 54, "at least 120 surviving senet boards are known from Ancient Egypt". Parlett 1999: 68 notes that boards similar to the Egyptian ones are also found in Sudan, Cyprus and Phoenicia. The following paragraphs of my text are based on Piccione 2007.
16 Piccione 2007: 62.
17 See Piccione 2007: 55–58.

18 See Piccione 2007: 58–61.
19 Piccione 2007: 60.
20 Kendall 2007: 40–42.
21 Whittaker 2004: 284.
22 See a picture of the wall painting at https://www.europeana.eu/en/item/2063602/SWE_280_001, last visited 9 May 2020.
23 Purcell 1995: 14.
24 Purcell 1995: 23. On dice and divination see also Graf 2005.
25 See Chapter 1, where the tarot pack is presented. In the occultist world the triumphs are known as the major Arcana, while the four suits constitute the minor Arcana. Fortune-telling tarots have their own nomenclature and design traditions. Even the four suits may have different names and traditions, the most characteristic being that the coins are named *pentacles*.
26 Dummett 1980: 165.
27 See Dummett 1980: 65–67, where he shows that "by 1442, at least in the d'Este court at Ferrara, Tarot cards were well known and in some demand".
28 See Parlett 1991: 244.
29 Dummett 1980: 98–99.
30 See Dummett 1980: 96–101.
31 See Dummett 1980: 94.
32 For a closer study, see Dummett 1980: 102–163.
33 To name but a few, the Popess was renamed to "the High Priestess", the Pope to "the Chief Hierophant" or "High Priest", the Chariot to "Osiris Triumphant", the Tower to "the Castle of Plutus", the World to "Time", the Last Judgement to "Creation".
34 According to Dummett 1980: 106, fortune-telling by playing cards appeared in Paris in the period before the French Revolution and it was intensified in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic era.
35 Dummett 1980: 135 and 136 respectively.
36 Dummett 1980: 144 and 147.
37 On the *Royal Game of Ur* see Becker 2007; Finkel 2007b; De Voogt, Dunn-Vaturi & Eerkens 2013. For a visual demonstration of how the game was played see a video produced by the British Museum at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZskjLq040I.
38 See Becker 2007: 12–14 and Finkel 2007b: 25–26, with relevant bibliography.
39 See Fairbairn 2007: 133–134.
40 See Wood 2018: 12, who names Lorenzo Spirito Gualtieri's *Book of Lots* (1482) and Sigismundo Fanti's *Triumph of Fortune* (1526).
41 In the USA it has been marketed by Milton Bradley as *Chutes and Ladders* since 1943. On the various versions and rules of the game see Botermans 2007: 19–32; Parlett 1999: 91–94. On its religious and cultural dimension see Shimkhada 1983.
42 Topsfield 2006: 143; emphasis in the original. Compare to Salen & Zimmerman 2004: 507: "Chutes and Ladders is not just a children's playtime activity, but a cultural document with a rich history, designed to express a religious doctrine of a particular time and place".
43 See Topsfield 1985.
44 See Topsfield 1985; Topsfield 2006; Shimkhada 1983. Topsfield notes that "three main sectarian types are found: Jain and Hindu, each with their own ants, and, more rarely, a Sufi Muslim version" (Topsfield 2006: 143).
45 Most students of the game do not even discuss its temporal origin. Dusenberry dates it to 200 BC but without any further argumentation or evidence (Dusenberry 2009: 646). Botermans presents an Egyptian spiral board treasured in the Albert Museum of London which is dated to 2800 BC, but there is no evidence that this is a board of a game similar to *Snakes and Ladders* (Botermans 2007: 20). Topsfield writes that "until earlier evidence is available, the origins and development of the several versions of the game must remain obscure" (Topsfield 1985: 212). The oldest dated board comes from 1735 (see Finkel 2004: 59).

46 See Topsfield 1985: 207; emphasis in the original.
47 Comparing the Nepalese to the Tibetan version of the game, Shimkhada concludes that the main difference between them in metaphysical terms is that "the Nepali version takes the Hindu path while the Tibetan takes the Buddhist" (Shimkhada 1983: 318).
48 Shimkhada 1983: 317–318.
49 Slightly varying combinations of vices and virtues are presented in Topsfield 1985 and Topsfield 2006.
50 See Topsfield 1985: 207.
51 See Topsfield 1985: 209-210.
52 See Topsfield 1985: 210, 213–214.
53 See the figure in Botermans 2007: 27. An examination of how these virtues and vices are illuminated will reveal more evidence on social notions of the period.
54 See Topsfield 1985: 205.
55 Let it be noted that the earliest known English board of the game (Bethnal Green Museum, acc. no. Misc. 8-1974) is spiral; see Topsfield 1985: 213 and Botermans 2007: 19–20.
56 See also above, Shimkhada's thesis that the horizontal row of game boards represent different "realms of human consciousness" (Shimkhada 1983: 318).
57 See Eliade 1958: 102–108, 163–171.
58 Mandala-formed boards may also be taken into consideration; see Topsfield 2006: 173–175.
59 An example may suffice: There are boards in which egoism is depicted as having five heads and sixteen arms (see Topsfield 2006: 148, nr. 4).
60 Patterson 2015b: 95.
61 See Caillois 2001: 82.
62 See Leone 2018: 3–4 and Bubczyk 2015: 33.
63 Seville 2016d: 91–94.
64 From *Ratis Raving* (or, *Advice from a Father to His Son*); cited from Bubczyk 2015: 25. See also Arcangeli 2003: 16.
65 See Arcangeli 2003: 113–114.
66 *A Parisian Journal 1405–1449*, translated by J. Shirley, Oxford 1968, p. 231; quoted from Eales 1986: 29.
67 See Kroke 2017: 51–52 and Parlett 1991: 38. By the way, the numbers are a clear proof of the popularity of the relevant games or types of games in cities in the fifteenth century.
68 See Leone 2018: 2.
69 See Bubczyk 2015: 35.
70 Murray 1969/1913: 408.
71 Murray 1969/1913: 410.
72 Bubczyk 2015: 28–31.
73 For all these rules see Bubczyk 2015: 31–36.
74 See Arcangeli 2003: 59.
75 Bubczyk 2015: 38.
76 See Bubczyk 2015: 32.
77 See Ortalli 1997: 111–112, referring to prelates receiving income from gambling houses and activities in 1368 in Rome and in 1441 in Cologne.

7

THE GLADIATORIAL GAMES AS A HISTORICAL SOURCE

The heavy bronze head-and-face-covering helmet of the *Murmillo* gladiator is one of the most characteristic symbols of the Roman civilization. Just the picture of it reminds us of one of the most debated and still intelligible sides of the Romans, namely their addiction to violence and death as spectacles.

Apart from witnessing on the material culture and the military technology of the period, the helmet functions as a starting point for reflection on the Roman culture, society and political system. Imagining the gladiator entering the arena, we move ourselves to the heart of a Roman site of memory, the amphitheatre, for most of us pictured in the form of the most celebrated Colosseum.[1]

This is exactly the main aim of this chapter: To open a discussion on how a historian might use the material remnants of the gladiatorial games and the primary sources witnessing on the organization and the rules of the games as windows for the study of the Roman Empire, society and culture, on the basis of some of the approaches presented in the previous chapters.[2]

Many of us today would not understand how and why a deadly activity as the gladiatorial combats would be considered as games. Or why they would even be called *games*. But the Romans did so. Fights between gladiators or between gladiators and wild animals were included in the spectacles the Romans called *ludi*, which means *games*. No doubt, they were not seen as games by the gladiators themselves. But for the spectators, the public *ludi* was one of the most appreciated recreations of the Roman period—if not the most appreciated.

The very fact that a civilization with a high culture included fights to death in its pastimes is in itself a valuable reason to include the gladiatorial combats in a study dedicated to games. Another equally important reason is that the gladiatorial games are an important witness of how different the European culture became in comparison to its Roman predecessor, while at the same time remaining equally excited by violence and death—even if today they both have been

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masked and/or virtualized. In regard to the latter, before condemning the "barbarian" Romans we should take into consideration that human history witnesses countless cases of violent spectacles, death being a possible result in a number of them. Our times are not an exception.[3]

Underlining that the gladiatorial games is a unique phenomenon in history, and exactly because of that, let us discuss it as a historical source, considering first briefly the background of the games. Their roots are to be found in the first half of the first millennium BC. From the third century BC onwards, the content of the games was expanded, to include animal fights, as well as the throwing of condemned criminals to the beasts. At about the same time, fights between pairs of gladiators were also introduced to the games.[4]

Originally, the games had a metaphysical dimension. At the beginning, they were organized to celebrate some of the Roman gods. Later, they were also organized by individuals who wanted to honour or commemorate a deceased member of their families. Written sources witness to these funeral games, in which slaves of the deceased person(s) or other gladiators were to engage in fight-to-death combats.[5] Despite their popularity, the gladiatorial games remained private during the Republic.

So, it is not by chance that the gladiatorial fights were called *munus* (plural: *munera*), which means "an 'obligation' or 'duty' owed to a deceased relative (normally the head of the family), who had joined the realm of the *manes*, the spirits of the dead".[6] But we should not get astray: Although death was the central element in these games (the death of both the deceased person and of some of the fighters) we should keep in mind that of equal importance was the entertainment of the audience, i.e. those who would honour the deceased by their presence. And we should take into consideration that the games were not merely bloodsheds but well organized spectacles, with concrete rules on what kind of moves were allowed to the gladiators and what not.[7] In fact, it seems that the chances for a gladiator to die during or because of a fight were approximately one in ten.[8]

The games were normally advertised by various means. This is witnessed by archaeological evidence, namely tablets that were placed on central and crowded spots for everyone to see. One of these tablets, found in the city of Pompeii, reads:

> Twenty pairs of gladiators, owned by D. Lucretius Sater Valens, lifelong priest to Nero Caesar Augustus, and ten pairs of gladiators, owned by his son D. Lucretius Valens, will engage in combat in Pompeii on the 8th, 9th, 11th, and 12th of April. There will also be wild animal hunts, as permitted by law. The seats will be shaded with awnings.[9]

We see that the games were to last four days and they were enriched by another popular Roman activity, the hunt of wild animals.

The last centuries of the Roman era were a period of decline, both for the empire and, consequently, for the games. Military, political and economic

explanations have been provided for the decline of the games. To the very high cost of their organization we should add the lack of prisoners of war, as well as the change of the political system that made the organization of the games as a means of self-promotion less attractive politically. As the magistrates were not anymore elected but appointed by the emperor, they did not have much to gain by investing whole properties in the games.

To those undoubted explanations we should add a cultural one. A role to the decline of the games was also played by Christianity, on two levels: First, the new religion was negative to any kind of athletic events—I would dare to say: to any form of ancient entertainment in general. Second, Christianity established new humanitarian values, including the respect of human life. For both these reasons, the more influential Christianity became the closer the games came to their extinction.

The condemnation of the games by the fathers of the Church was followed by imperial prohibitions. The emperor Constantine I (306–327 AD) issued in 325 an edict prohibiting the existence of gladiators. This law was not enough to end the contests, but it was an important first step.[10] We cannot spot with accuracy the point when the games were abandoned, but the absence of references to them in late fifth-century sources may be used as an *argumentum ex silentio*: It seems that sometime in the middle of the fifth century the combats were placed in the past.

So, how could we use the gladiatorial games as historical sources? In other words, what kind of historical evidence could we get out of the relevant textual, material and visual sources? The following pages present just a few thoughts, according to which the games might be used as sources of political, cultural, social and gender history.[11]

Political approach

Imagine a tournament of any game or sport being arranged regularly within the Parliament of your country by the most prominent politicians (or politicians-to-be) with a considerable amount of the citizens attending it. This was exactly the case with the gladiatorial games in Rome. Before the establishment of the first permanent amphitheatre in the eternal city in the middle of the first century BC, the gladiatorial games were staged in the Forum Romanum, the centre of political and social life of the capital.[12] And they were organized and sponsored by the most powerful members of the society, those who were leading or had the ambition of leading the Roman Republic. This makes the gladiatorial fights one of the historical exceptions, in which games were closely related to the political activity, being indeed a part of high politics.

As mentioned earlier, the gladiatorial fights had originally a religious and funeral dimension. This dimension was lost—or at least became secondary—when the popularity of *munera* made the arena an attractive place for the manifestation of political power. Thus, it was just a matter of time for the games to become a political act. The time had come by the late Republic.[13]

By the end of the third century, the gladiatorial games were already very popular. This tempted politicians to use the arena for promoting their careers, as the games gave them a great opportunity to communicate with the masses. By focusing on the communicative dimension of the games, Philip Thomas has concluded that the games were "the most important instrument of electoral propaganda and publicity".[14] At the same time, not being able to provide for the organization of gladiatorial games could ruin one's political career.[15] This reveals an aristocratic dimension in Roman politics, as it was only those who could afford organizing extremely expensive games that could have a long and successful career in the political arena. It also reveals the power of communication in Roman politics and the non-political fundaments a political career was often based on.

The political importance of organizing the gladiatorial games and using them for political communication and propaganda remained high in the imperial period. During this period, this importance is also witnessed in various sources, mainly, but not only, textual. We need not see further than the lives of emperors by Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (born ca. 70, died sometime after 121/2 AD). Suetonius is mainly known as a biographer. What is of interest for our purpose is that in his biographies of emperors he dedicates a chapter on how each emperor dealt with the gladiatorial games.[16] In time, the gladiatorial games became closely associated with the imperial cult.[17]

Organizing the games had its political function as it revealed social influence that could be transformed into political power. A proof for the political function of the games is that during the civil wars that followed the suicide of emperor Nero (68–69 AD) all four emperors who ruled in succession organized gladiatorial games to strengthen their position. The importance of the games for the emperors is proven by the fact that during the imperial period the games could only be held in Rome by the emperor or in his name, with his explicit permission.[18]

A number of emperors did not only organize the games, but also put on the gladiatorial costume and fought in the arena. Nero and Commodus (177–192 AD) were the most famous among them, but Caligula (37–41), Titus (79–81), and Hadrian (117–138) are also known to have performed as gladiators. Needless to say, every possible precaution was taken so that the emperors would step out of the arena with their body and dignity untouched. In fact, it was mostly mock battles they participated in. But still, this is a point making clear that the arena was for some emperors a place where their imperial power was (or had) to be demonstrated. It should be noted, though, that these were the absolute exceptions; for reasons we will consider below, participating in the gladiatorial games, as well as in any public performance, was socioculturally evaluated as indecent.[19]

Another question interesting for the historian is related to the reason why the games were so important for politicians, the emperors and the political life in general. An answer may be given if we place the games within the general framework of *panem et circenses* (often translated mistakenly and misleadingly as "bread and circuses"). This famous maxim was coined by the Roman poet Juvenal in

his masterpiece *Satires*. In satire 10 (v. 81), commenting on the people of Rome ("the mob of Remus", as he calls it) he writes:

> There was a time when the People bestowed every honor—the governance of provinces, civic leadership, military command—but now they hold themselves back, now two things only do they ardently desire: bread and games.[20]

By "games" Juvenal meant mainly four things: Gladiatorial fights, public executions, animal hunting and chariot races. He believed that the free distribution of bread and the games as entertainment was the best means to keep the population under control. This seems indeed to have been true. But at the same time, the games offered an opportunity to the masses to express their feelings on important matters, in a way that was evaluated as legitimate. They did so by applauding, hissing, booing, cursing or performing menacing gestures to politicians related to specific matters at their appearance in the audience. Also, welcoming prominent politicians in silence, without cheering them, was in itself a political act. So, in the imperial period, the amphitheatre was in fact the only allowed political assembly of the Roman citizens.[21]

The audience's reactions in the arena sometimes targeted the emperor himself. In fact, the games gave the Roman political system a flavour of democracy during the imperial period, as the people could express their feelings about the emperor (in one of the abovementioned ways) and even had the possibility of going against his will, for example in regard to the fate of a defeated gladiator. This remnant of the old republican times was also clear to the gladiators themselves, who tried to win the favour of the crowd; this could save their lives and in the long run even make them free. As a historical evidence, it shows the need of the political system to have safety valves, small openings for challenging—even if at the lowest possible level—the absolute power of the monarch.[22] Trying to silence the crowd could prove a lethal mistake, as for example in the case of the emperors Caligula and Domitian (81–96 AD), whose assassinations were linked to their efforts to silence the audiences in the arena.[23]

Despite the popularity and political importance of the games—or probably because of them—there were Roman voices evaluating the games negatively in relation to politics. Cicero expressed the opinion that games were a distraction for politicians.[24] He also witnesses on at least one case, in which the amphitheatre became an arena for political corruption, through the distribution of privileged tickets for the games by patrons who tried to win by bribing the clients who were related to other politicians.[25]

As any public assembly, the amphitheatre could become dangerous for those in power. This is one of the reasons why the emperors tried to keep control of the gatherings and sometimes they punished cities who had revolted against them by a prohibition to hold the games. We know of such a prohibition by Marcus Aurelius for the city of Ephesus in 176 AD.[26]

Furthermore, an individual owing a considerable number of gladiators could become politically dangerous, as he could challenge those in power, who were almost always aware of the possibility. Indeed, gladiators were used by their owners as a private army, as for example when a politician named Clodius used his brother's gladiators to stage a riot in 57 BC. His main aim was to prevent a vote he was opposing. This is how the Roman historian Dio Cassius (155–235 AD) records the event:

> Many disorderly proceedings were the result, chief of which was that during the very talking of the vote on the measure [to recall Cicero from exile] Clodius, knowing that the multitude would be on Cicero's side, took the gladiators that his brother held in readiness for the funeral games of Marcus, his relative, and rushing into the assemblage, wounded many and killed many others. Consequently, the measure was not passed.[27]

A final word should be said on the amphitheatre as a political tool. The establishments of amphitheatres in most of the urban centres of the empire functioned as a reminder of the power of Rome and as a threat to anyone who might think of challenging it.[28] The Roman-Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (37–ca100 AD), for example, witnesses in his *Jewish War* on how the emperor Titus (39–81 AD) turned the games into media spreading a strong message to anyone who could think of revolting against the empire: after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, he sent thousands of adult prisoners of war in the arenas of the area, to be slaughtered in gladiatorial fights celebrating the reasserted imperial control over Judea.[29]

The gladiatorial games functioned as a political teaching tool for the Romans as well. By watching the games, every citizen (who was at the same time a soldier or a potential soldier) could reflect on what happened to defeated soldiers. This also applied to children, who were listening about the games and their participants in their everyday life.[30]

Cultural approach

What kind of culture could have a gladiatorial helmet and the Colosseum as one of its symbols? Before trying to answer the question, I would like to underline two things. First, a thorough examination of the gladiatorial games in cultural terms should place the games in the general picture of the notion of violence in Roman culture,[31] which is something far beyond the scope of this subchapter. Second, every historical culture has countless dimensions. Each one of them offers to its student just a small piece of the total mosaic. Thus, studying the gladiatorial games we can understand only a tiny piece of the Roman cultural identity. But the popularity of the games makes this piece an important one.

The cultural analysis of a phenomenon so complex as the gladiatorial games could not but be endless. Countless are also the approaches used to discuss the games in a cultural perspective. Various scholars have related the games to

religious, anthropological or historical dimensions of the Roman culture. To name but a few: From a religious and anthropological perspective and referring to the beginnings of the games, Alison Futrell claims that "the original purpose and meaning of such funeral games may be understood as a form of human sacrifice: men fought to the death at the funeral of a much-valued leader, whose spirit benefited from the spilling of blood".[32] From a social perspective, J.P. Toner explains the extreme popularity of the games by claiming that "it might seem strange that violence was an obsession in an ordered society but it reflected the force that maintained the order itself".[33] All in all, it has been claimed that the games "were acceptable because institutionalized violence was essential to the formation and continuity of Roman culture".[34]

What does the study of *ludi* reveal on the cultural side of the Roman Empire and society? What could we understand, for example, about how the Romans evaluated human life? What does it mean for the qualities of the Roman civilization that death was a central element of entertainment?

To be sure, there were thinkers who expressed their opposition to some of the aspects of the games.[35] But their negative evaluation was not accompanied by scepticism on the games' relation to violence, their lack of respect for the human life and so on. In other words, their criticism was not based on cultural principles or what we would today call humanitarian values. They criticized the games as a waste of money and time. This gives us a clear picture of the priorities of the Roman intellectual elite and its cultural profile.

At the same time, the enthusiastic attendance of the "average Roman" demonstrates how the society in general was influenced by what we could call mainstream culture. But the obsession with the games was not limited to that. As J.P. Toner has claimed, the appeal of the gladiatorial games was "broadly cross-social and cross-gender". A considerable number of Romans were addicted to the games, children included the role of gladiators in their play, and the games were a subject of discussion in everyday life.[36]

The games were the most popular entertainment shows of the period, much more popular than theatre and other performances. And as such, they could shed some light to the Roman principles of communication. One may study for example the outfits worn and the weapons used by the gladiators. Most outfits of the professionals were strange and sometimes not at all convenient, and their main purpose was to generate excitement among the audience and to gain the support of the crowd. By studying visual sources depicting the outfits used we also get a view of the aesthetics related to the gladiatorial world.

Today, we approach the gladiatorial games as a Roman trademark. It seems that this was also how the Romans themselves saw upon the games: As a collective activity that meant something more than just entertainment. Indeed, the games were closely related to the Roman identity and what we may call Romanization.[37]

This most probably explains why some emperors participated actively in the games, fighting in the arena. Participation meant sharing central elements of what it meant to be Roman. As a proof, we may recall Cicero who believed that

"the strongest expression of the judgement of *the whole Roman People* was plainly given by an audience at gladiatorial games" adding that the audience was "the unanimous expression of the feeling of the *entire Roman People*".[38]

The number of amphitheatres erected in various places of the empire witnesses to something more, and probably more important, than the popularity of the games. In a multicultural empire, as the Roman, it was of crucial importance to imbue the society with elements that promoted the feeling of commonness, elements which made the inhabitants of areas far away from the capital to feel Romans, to identify themselves as citizens of the empire and as insiders of its culture. The gladiatorial games were one of these elements.[39]

Attending the games was for the inhabitants of the empire an element of integration to the Roman civilization. At the same time, adopting such a trademark of the Roman culture was also an element of cultural assimilation. Concerning the interaction between the two classical civilizations, the Roman and the Greek, there are historians who believe that what we know from other areas is also relevant in regard to the games: the interaction was expressed in a kind of mutual adaptation, which resulted in changes in both.[40]

But there were still differences. A telling one is related to the nudity of the gladiators in relation to the Greek athletes. Gladiators were very often depicted in art.[41] In most cases, they are depicted with exposed torsos, which were supposed to give the spectators the opportunity to have a better view of the wounds and the blood spelled. But, to the limit of my knowledge, there is no depiction of a fully naked gladiator. Full nakedness was still a taboo. This comes in total contrast to the ancient Greeks who had no similar taboo. This demonstrates a clear cultural difference between how nudity was perceived in Rome. With this as a starting point, a historian might get deeper into the reasons why.

Another cultural element we may study through the games is related to the perception of death. First, we have to notice that there are not many historical societies, where killing and death was conceived and valued as a way of entertainment. This reveals something important on the Roman culture, namely that there was no understanding of human life as sacred or valuable as such. The life of all those who might end up fighting in the arena was of no significance in the Roman mentality. Furthermore, *ludi* may help the historian study how the Romans commemorated the dead. In fact, as mentioned above, holding the games was one of the ways used to honour deceased members of the family.

Let us now turn to another aspect of the relationship between the games and the Roman pagan religion. We know that the gladiators had their own patron gods. The choice of the divine protectors of this very special professional association may shed some light on values and virtues related to the gladiators and fighting in general, on the issues that were of utmost importance for the gladiators themselves, as well as on religious interactions between the Roman religious system and other pagan religions of the period.

Predictably, Mars, Diana, Hercules and Victoria were the patron divinities representing prowess. Another divine figure, Fortuna, was also venerated by

gladiators, for obvious reasons. In addition, there was another patron goddess not that expected (and this reveals something about the principles of the games): In many amphitheatres the Romans included shrines dedicated to Nemesis, the goddess of human justice, vengeance and retribution, who seems to have been the primary patroness of the gladiatorial games.[42]

But this is not the only religious element to be related to the study of the gladiatorial fights. A number of other issues may be examined, as for example the use of religion to promote the imperial propaganda, the imperial cult in the arena (both in Rome and in the provinces), or the interaction between humans and gods in the amphitheatre.[43]

The games may also function as an entrance point to study the primary cultural values of the Roman society. Prowess is one of them, dignity another. Prowess, the Roman *virtus,* was for the average Roman directly related to war and social status. As the gladiatorial games were a warlike social activity, they were also supposed to be a place where *virtus* was appreciated. This is the main reason why the display of prowess and courage was the gladiators' pass to survival and freedom.[44] *Dignitas* was an important value for the Roman society too. One of the main reasons why the gladiators were so downgraded (even though admired for their strength and brutality) was that they participated in public performances, which in the Roman mind were conflicted with dignity.

Dignity and prowess were demanded by the gladiators even at the moment of their death. In fact, they were trained on how to receive the final blow, after they had been defeated and the crowd or the editor of the games had decided their death. Accepting death in dignity could turn the gladiator into a model of what it meant to be Roman. In the words of J.P. Toner:

> The gladiator had to die in the correct position—chest out, leaning to the right, head drooping, half-seated on his weapons. It was the dying swan of the Roman world; but instead of rich romanticism, it represented a cool, impersonal, and formalized way of death.[45]

Let me now relate the study of the games in one of the theories presented above, namely the theory of cultural hegemony. The evidence presented so far in this chapter shows that both in the republican and the imperial period of Roman history, the political elite and the emperor used the games as tools of cultural hegemony, which was to be transformed into domination by power whenever the leaders felt threatened. Arranging the games and inviting the plebs to attend them, the elite was not simply giving the plebs the opportunity for *panem et circenses*. They were also letting the plebs admire their economic, social and political power and feel inferior and subordinate to the elite cultural ideals and values. This is clear in the following passage, where J.P. Toner speaks about the imperial use of games:

> In the games […] the emperors were attempting to market the old elite ideals in a radically new packaging with the purpose of enticing the lower

> classes into, and then training them in, some semblance of aristocratic values; for just as they were to share elite pleasures, so they were to share their morals. Through the universal media of the body and violence, they drew on common cultural themes and collective mythology in an attempt to produce a social consensus. The games were a popularization or traditional elite leisure and culture. They represent the fusing of popular and traditional elite cultures, and as such were an imperial reinterpretation of lower-class leisure and aristocratic military training and hunting. And just as the purpose of elite philosophy was to inculcate *virtus*, moral quality, so the games were to act as mass philosophy.[46]

With this claim, J. P. Toner builds a bridge between the cultural and the social study of the games. Indeed, it is tempting to think that the games were used by the elite as a tool of cultural hegemony that could enforce both the political system and the social hierarchy of the Roman Republic and later the Empire. To reflect on this thesis, we should first try to consider the Roman amphitheatre as a mirror of the Roman society. So, was the gladiator entering the Colosseum and looking at the crowd through the holes of his helmet getting a reflection of the Roman society?

Social approach

The element of the gladiatorial games that strikes their modern student is of course that they were games in which human lives were at stake. The spectator went to the arena conscious of that. The second point that strikes us is the popularity of the games, confirmed by almost every written source we have at disposition, even those who were critical towards the games.[47]

The point becomes clearer, if we take into consideration that in the beginning attending the games was not free of charge. The spectators were to buy tickets to watch the gladiatorial shows. This was changed in 122 BC, when, after an initiative by the people's tribune Gaius Gracchus, free seats were distributed to anyone who wanted to see the gladiators fighting, killing and dying. Despite reactions from other tribunes, free entrance to the games was finally to be institutionalized.

This change was not only social; it was also political. The political dimension is related to the fact that individuals and families used the games to develop or improve their political influence, in other words to maintain or extend their cycles of clients (please recall the significance of the relationship between patrons and clients in Roman politics). Another political step was taken during the first century BC: from then on, the institutionalized games were to be organized and controlled not by individuals but by the Roman authorities.

The importance of the gladiatorial games for the Roman authorities and the society becomes clearer if we take into consideration that they were extremely expensive. It was not only the show itself that demanded the allocation of

considerable resources. The transformation of slaves, convicted criminals or defeated enemies into gladiators was a process that presupposed an investment in time, training, and special equipment. In the meantime, they had to be fed, accommodated and guarded. Medical care was also to be provided, both before the fights, but also after them, in case they got out of the arena alive but wounded.[48]

So, all the evidence taken together, the first answer is positive: yes, the gladiator was facing representatives of the whole Roman society. All sections of the society were represented in the stands; and most of those who could not afford a payed ticket or did not have the connections to get a free ticket were envying and beatifying those who could.

Let us now imagine that a historian, a historical sociologist or any other student of the Roman society would put on the gladiatorial helmet and enter the arena. What would s/he see around her/him? We may start with the underworld of the gladiators.

The first interesting social aspect that should be mentioned in relation to the social status of gladiators is something witnessed by various sources: they were representing the sediment of the Roman society. The gladiators had the legal status of a slave and they were considered as *infames*, a social category of shame that included all those who had not legal control of their own body, namely gladiators, actors, prostitutes, pimps, and the *lanistae*, i.e. the trainers and sometimes owners of gladiators.[49] They had no legal or civic rights and even their own life was laying at the hands of others. In fact, for some of them, independently of background, the arena represented their last hope. During brave (and victorious) fighting, they could earn, after some years, their freedom. Some of them did so. Some others enjoyed in time a rather strange kind of glory. Their achievements in the arena made them "real celebrities, immortalized in inscriptions, art, and songs".[50]

But who were they? Who were these human beings who were obliged to accept a non-human status and identity? According to the sources, our student would meet five different types of gladiators. Some of them were prisoners of war, who were turned into gladiators. Others were *damnati*, men convicted of one of the four cardinal crimes, i.e. murder, treason, robbery, or arson. During the early period, when games were also organized privately, slaves were pressed to fight, sometimes because their deceased owner had dictated so in his will. A fourth category was people sent in the arena at a moment's notice by the emperor, the local governor, or some other ruler. Finally, there were few people, both men and women, who volunteered for fighting, hoping for gain and/or fame.

Our imagined student could also experience what Alison Futrell has coined as "crimes of status", i.e. members of the Roman elites appearing as performers in the arena. In a society where social order and status quo were of crucial importance, to see members of the higher class—and even worse, the emperor—fighting in the arena was a challenge evaluated almost as immoral. As Futrell has noted, "elites were supposed to control their social and political inferiors, not be controlled by the *lanista* and the shrieking crowd in the arena".[51] This is why in

various periods there were legal efforts to prohibit senators and equestrians from fighting in the combats. The result of these efforts is unclear.

What our student would most probably be surprised from is a kind of social stratification that existed within the gladiatorial world, a microcosm which included not only the combatants, but also the support personnel and the criminals convicted to death in the arena. This was not much unlike the society outside the arena. In the words of Rose MacLean, who has studied the social dimension of Roman spectacles, including the audience, "differentiation among the participants of Roman spectacles […] presented a partial diagram of society, from utterly dehumanised *damnati ad bestias* to servants, combatants and administrators, not to mention the levels of stratification that distinguished spectators from one another".[52]

Becoming a gladiator, our imagined scholar would come in physical contact with the material evidence of the games, namely the weaponry and armour used by the combatants. Apart from witnessing on military technology and the materials used—something we also are aware of from other sources—the examination of the gladiatorial equipment shows something about the respect or the Roman society for the army. As there is no gladiatorial equipment modelled on that of Roman soldiers, we understand that the Roman society would not approve seeing gladiators appearing in the arena as Roman soldiers. Most probably, both the Roman citizens and the Roman politicians, and later the emperors, did not want to mix the army with entertainment and the soldier to the gladiator, who represented the less respected stratum of the Roman society—not even at a visual level.

Let us now think of our student turning her/his eyes from the arena to the grandstand. What would s/he see through the holes of her/his helmet by looking up and around? Her/his trained eye would notice the seating arrangement of the people, which reflected the social hierarchy of Rome. If s/he could have a diachronic glimpse of the seating arrangement in the republican and the imperial period, s/he would become aware of the development of the social stratification in Rome. In republican times, people could mix and mingle freely, being able to seat anywhere. In the imperial times, decrees were issued to regulate the seating according to the classes of the Roman society. The better seats were now given to the most privileged, who could also enjoy some luxury by using cushions or sunhats.[53] Our student would also notice the differences in clothing. Tertullian offers a glimpse of the grandstand, when he writes about "the spectators, arranged in good order—important people dressed in signs of their status, soldiers in their parade uniforms, and the emperor in triumphal garb".[54]

If our student was not paralyzed by fear, s/he would also realize that the arena was among other things a place for social interaction of any kind, including intellectual discussions and even flirting. Indeed, many Romans attended the games exactly for one of these reasons, socializing and flirting. Regarding the latter, it should be mentioned that Ovid in his *Art of Love* gives instructions on how to flirt in the amphitheater.[55]

My guess is that our imagined student would agree on that the amphitheatre was a worthy reflection of the Roman society. The social study of the games does not seem to offer insight not already witnessed by other sources, it does though confirm what we know already in a clear and powerful way. This also applies to the social position and value of women, to which we will turn in the following section.

Gender approach

Does the sociocultural study of the gladiatorial games show that they were an expression of what it meant for Romans to be male? The general assumption is that indeed the gladiatorial games were male-dominated. But a gender approach to their study may reveal interesting nuances. Such a gender approach may focus on two different study questions: Did women enter the arena as gladiators? And did they have the right to attend the games as spectators?

To start with, women entered the arena in various circumstances: To get mutilated, to be executed, or to be thrown to the beasts. In some other cases, they were "the centerpieces of sexual demonstrations in which they were forced to copulate with beasts."[56]

Apart from that, they also had the right to fight both other women and animals. Both textual and visual sources make clear that in Rome there were some female gladiators. They were, of course, the absolute minority. Some of them participated voluntarily both in the fights and the training. It is not difficult to imagine that female fighting was a very special and lavish part of the games.[57]

Among the countless Roman depictions of gladiators, there is just one showing women fighting in the arena. It is a marble relief that was discovered in Halicarnassus, an ancient city at the site of modern Bodrum in Turkey, treasured at the British Museum in London since 1846.[58] It is showing the two gladiators, named Achillia and Amazon, fighting. They are armed with swords and shields and they use the same equipment as male gladiators, but without helmets. Their names are inscribed in Greek in the platform, on which they stand. On each side of the platform, a head represents the spectators. Above the gladiators' heads, the inscription ΑΠΕΛΥΘΗΣΑΝ ("they are released") shows that most probably the relief was made to commemorate their release from service or their discharge after a draw. The women's names are a clear reference to a well-known mythological motif, the legendary battle between the Homeric hero Achilles and the Amazon queen Penthesilleia, who fought in the Trojan War on the side of the Trojans.[59] Another explanation may be symbolic, that this was supposed to be a battle between a personification of the Amazons versus the female version of the most famous Greek fighter of Greek mythology.[60]

The phenomenon of female gladiators was of course very limited. In his study dedicated to "Female gladiators in the Roman World", Stephen Brunet uses three main arguments. The first is linguistic, referring to the absence of a special term for the female gladiators. Based on the fact that "the Romans never used the word gladiatrix" and that the "the term *ludia* referred not to a female gladiator or beast

hunter but to a gladiator's wife or concubine", Brunet argues that "the Romans never developed a standardized terminology to describe female gladiators because they were not a sufficiently common phenomenon". His second argument is related to the lack of relevant archaeological evidence. It is not a coincidence, he writes, that there is only one archaeological witness on female gladiatorial fights, namely the marble relief of Halicarnassus. Brunet's third argument is based on the absence of female gladiators in art representation of the gladiatorial games. Despite the fact that the gladiatorial games were a highly popular subject in art, the depiction of female gladiators is limited to the Halicarnassus relief.[61]

The participation in the games was, as mentioned above, an issue of Romanization and Roman values. As such, the participation of women was not always approved. This applies mainly for the upper-class society women. Despite the fact that there are sources presenting some Roman women participating in gladiatorial training, "the likelihood of seeing an upper-class woman actually perform in the arena was probably nonexistent".[62] This means that the witness of Tacitus that in 64 AD women from the elite class (as well as senators) performed in the gladiatorial shows is no more than one of the few exceptions.[63]

We may now turn to our second working question: Did women have the right to attend the games as spectators? Yes, the stands were open not only to average women, but to the empress, elite women and priestesses as well. But there were restrictions, particularly after the introduction of a law regulating seating in the games by Augustus. We know for example that women were relegated to the back seats, most probably because the seating plan was to reflect the Roman political and social organization (where women had no real position) and because the games were supposed to have an educating dimension, promoting fortitude and endurance in battle, which was again something not aimed at women.[64]

There are also sources speaking about sexual relations between gladiators and upper-class ladies. To quote Tertullian, "men gave their souls to the gladiators and women, both their souls and their bodies".[65] At least two royals were sexually involved with gladiators, Messalina (ca. 17/20–48 AD), the third wife of the emperor Claudius, and Faustina (ca. 130–175/6 AD), daughter of the emperor Antoninus Pius and mother of Commodus.[66]

Another sexual element related to the gladiators is that some of them used names that were erotically charged to gain attention or improve their attractiveness.[67] The relation between the games and sex resulted in a change in the erotic terminology in Roman times. In fact, sex took on a gladiatorial symbolic vocabulary. Some Romans would present is playfully as "Venus' gladiatorial games". Even dreaming of being a gladiator was interpreted as marriage in the near future. For the dream-interpreter Artemidorus, the type of weapons in the dream revealed the character of the woman the dreamer was to get married to.[68]

In general, it seems that the gladiators were included among the sex-symbols of the period, mainly due to their appearance and their close association to valor and death. Epigrams from Pompeii for example present two named gladiators as the dreams of young women.[69]

Closing, the answer to both our working questions is positive. Even if as an exception, women did have the right to participate in the games, goth as fighters and as spectators. This underlined in a distinctive way their existence in a male dominated society, even if their peripheral role and position confirmed this male domination. In the words of Stephen Brunet, "taking part in the games, an activity normally open only to men, allowed women a chance to overcome the limitations of their feminine nature".[70]

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The *murmillo* gladiator, in his extremely heavy weaponry, was clearly a man. As any other gladiator, he was a man without rights, representing the bottom of the Roman society. He was the victim of a culture that did not have yet included the respect of human life in its values, unless this life was that of a Roman citizen. Although, he was expected to fight for his life according to the Roman values of prowess and dignity, even if deprives from any dignity. Doing so, he could enjoy glory and hopefully gain his freedom.

Entering the amphitheatre he was becoming an element of the political game of Rome, a game that was based on the communicative power of violence, the overwhelming experience of ritualized death, the transformation of the arena into a location of legitimate political interaction, which maintained its political significance even in the imperial times. His helmet has remained since a symbol of the Roman civilization, as well as an eternal reminder of the differences between modern cultures and even the highest cultures of the past.

NOTES

1 On the Roman amphitheater see Welch 2009. On the Colosseum see Hopkins & Beard 2005 and Welch 2009: 128–162.
2 A considerable number of gladiatorial helmets survive, as well as other equipment used by the gladiators. The material study of the games is mainly related to the examination of the weaponry and equipment used, objects used by the spectators, and the very bones of the gladiators which witness on the fights and the everyday life and training. Another material aspect is related to the arenas used to the games. Over two hundred amphitheatres have been identified in various areas of the empire. Apart from their architectural value, they are also valuable witnesses for the study of art and decoration. Furthermore, they are repositories of various objects related to the games.
3 See for example Fagan 2014: 466. On ancient and modern attitudes towards the gladiatorial games and on death as a spectacle in other premodern societies (including an Aztec form of gladiatorial sacrifice) see Kyle 1998: 2–7 and 133–140 respectively.
4 On the origins of the gladiatorial games see Welch 2009: 11–29 and Futrell 2006: 4–7. The oldest mention of a gladiatorial fight is dated to 264 BC (see Zaleski 2014: 592, referring to Valerius Maximus 2.4.7 and Livy's *Epitome* 16).
5 Let it be noted that funeral games were widespread, not only among the Romans but also in the Greek world.
6 Zaleski 2014: 592; cf. Futrell 2006: 6.
7 See Fagan 2014; cf. Toner 1995: 42, who claims that «the Roman public did not come to see bloodshed, they came to see, without apology, a professional performance".
8 Ville 1981: 318–325.

9 *Corpus Inscriptorum Latinarum* (CIL), l. 4, no. 3884. Translated by F. Meijer; quoted from Van Creveld 2013: 69. On the advertizements of gladiatorial games see also Hopkins 1983: 25–26.
10 *Codex Theodosianus* 15.12.1; see Potter 2004: 428–429.
11 This is not the right place to discuss the deeper anthropological, sociological, cultural and even historical meaning of the gladiatorial games. It should be noted though that the efforts to explain the nature and the meaning of the games has employed various theoretical and methodological approaches and has resulted in countless different explanations; see for example Kyle 1998: 7–10.
12 Welch 2009: 30–71; Dodge 2014: 547; Thomas 2010: 188.
13 See Futrell 2006: 11 and Zaleski 2014: 593, referring to Ville 1981: 14–19.
14 Thomas 2010: 191.
15 See Futrell 2006: 15.
16 See Van Creveld 2013: 73.
17 See Hopkins 1983: 13.
18 Van Creveld 2013: 72.
19 On emperors performing in the arena see Futrell 2006: 158–159; Hopkins 1983: 20–21.
20 Juvenal, *Satires*, 10.77–81, quoted from Futrell 2006: 33. On the misinterpretations of this famous passage see Parker & Braund 2012: 459–461 and Sanford 1951.
21 On the games as political assembly see Futrell 2006: 24–29 and Hopkins 1983: 14–20.
22 Welch 2009: 3 for example has related the popularity of the gladiatorial games to "a political disillusionment and loss of *dignitas* as Rome moved from a republican to a monarchical form of government".
23 Futrell 2006: 42; on the political power of the crowd, even over emperors, see also Hopkins 1983: 18–19.
24 Futrell 2006: 16.
25 Futrell 2006: 20.
26 On the importance of the games for the emperors see Futrell 2006: 29–42.
27 Quoted from Futrell 2006: 22.
28 Futrell 2006: 52.
29 Futrell 2006: 122.
30 See Hopkins 1983: 2.
31 Welch 2009: 4 for example writes that "the world in which the ancient Romans lived was one where violence was ordinary, both inside and outside of an arena context, and it is doubtful that viewing death in an amphitheatre held an overarching redemptive value for the Roman populace". See also Harris 1985 and Hopkins 1978.
32 Futrell 2006: 6. It should be noted that this view is evaluated as problematic, see for example Welch 2009: 3.
33 Toner 1995: 38.
34 Kyle 1998: 270.
35 See Futrell 2006: passim and Mammel 2014: 603–607.
36 Toner 1995: 35.
37 See for example Futrell 2006: 35–36; Carter 2014; Auguet 1994/1972: 209–210.
38 Cicero, *For Sestius*, 124–125, quoted from Futrell 2006: 26–27; emphasis added.
39 Welch 2009: 72–101 studies the erection of Roman stone amphitheatres in the republican period in relation to the Roman colonization and in terms of using architecture as a means of romanization.
40 See for example Lee 2014 and Carter 2014.
41 See Coulston 2009; Jacobelli 2003: 69–105; Tuck 2014: 426–427.
42 See Van Creveld 2013: 79, who comments that "had it not been for the gladiators, indeed, Nemesis would have found few people who worshipped her and practiced her cult" in Rome.
43 For an introduction to all these issues, see Zaleski 2014.

44 On *virtus* expressed in the Roman games and spectacles see Toner 1995: 44–49.
45 Toner 1995: 40–41.
46 Toner 1995: 52.
47 It should be noted that the popularity of the gladiatorial games was not only a Roman phenomenon. Several sources from Greek areas and the Middle East show that the fights were also popular there in the imperial period (see Carter 2014). There were though some Romans who had a negative attitude towards them, as for example Cicero and Seneca. We can be sure that the objections of Roman scholars had no influence on the masses who crowded the arenas.
48 MacLean 2014: 581.
49 MacLean 2014: 580–581.
50 Futrell 2006: 135. On the gladiators as heroes, see Hopkins 1983: 20–27.
51 Futrell 2006: 156.
52 MacLean 2014: 584; see also Kyle 1998: 79.
53 See Moore 1994; cf. Futrell 2006: 52, 80–83; Hopkins 1983: 17–18.
54 Quoted from Van Creveld 2013: 96.
55 On flirting in the amphitheater and reaction to it see Futrell 2006: 105–107.
56 Van Creveld 2013: 273.
57 On the female gladiators see Brunet 2014; Futrell 2006: 153–155.
58 See a photo, the relevant information and the curator's notes at the webpage of the British Museum: http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?assetId=147502001&objectId=399637&partId=1.
59 For an analysis of the relief see Coleman 2000.
60 See Brunet 2014: 486.
61 See Brunet 2014: 485–486.
62 Brunet 2014: 487.
63 Futrell 2006: 154.
64 See Brunet 2014: 487–488.
65 Quoted from Van Creveld 2013: 89 and 299.
66 See Brunet 2014: 484, referring to Dio Cassius 60.28.2; *Scriptores Historiae Augustae Marcus* 19.
67 See Van Creveld 2013: 299. On the "sexy gladiators" see Futrell 2006: 146–147.
68 Toner 1995: 35–36.
69 See Hopkins 1983: 21–23.
70 Brunet 2014: 488.

8

CHESS AS A HISTORICAL SOURCE

In a famous aphorism, the chess grandmaster and former world champion Anatoly Carpov claimed that "chess is everything—art, science, and sport". Was this an exaggeration? To judge by the thousands of pages written and published about chess for over a millennium, it is probably not. Being simple at first site and extremely complicated the deeper you get into it, chess has been extremely attractive over the centuries. Because of that, it is an important historical source for the study of various historical issues and thematic areas.

Chess was invented in northern India sometime before 600 AD and from there it was diffused to Persia and Mesopotamia to the West and China and Japan to the East. It reached Europe at the end of the first millennium, in Byzantium due to the direct contacts between the Byzantine and the Muslim world and in Western Europe because of the Arab conquests. It has been a very popular pastime since its invention and down to the present. For the last millennium it has also been a very popular and intriguing study object in various frameworks. In the recent decades these frameworks include, to name but a few, the fields of game studies, psychology, sociology and gender studies.[1]

Any historical study of chess, as of any other game, should start with its historical development. How old is the game? Could we identify varying stages in its historical development or its diffusion? Are there any periods or areas in which it was of particular popularity? Were there periods in which it was restricted, or even forbidden? If yes, why? These are but a few questions we may pose to the sources at disposition. Some of them are already dealt with in the previous chapters and will not be taken into consideration here.

After studying the relevant sources and literature to get a good overview of the history of the game, the historian should start analysing the evidence by approaching it in various ways, ideally as many as possible. In the following, I will present some of the approaches we may use to study chess as a historical

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source. Please note that the presentation has no hierarchical sequence; none of these approaches is evaluated as better as or more important than the others.

Political approach

Recalling that chess was originally a military game reflecting two armies at war, the historian might start by paying attention to the political dimension of the game. Indeed, chess might be considered as a game that included clear political elements from the very beginning. Given that the game is built around the figure of the king, all its elements have a flavor of politics. But there are more elements to be considered. Which are, for example, the other figures on the board and why it is these figures, and not any other, that are chosen to surround and protect the king and fight for him?

Let me present an example of such an approach: Focusing on the replacement of the vizier by the queen and the elephant by the bishop, the American gender scholar Marilyn Yalom claimed that these were changes with politico-historical background, which "corresponded to a new stage in European history, marked by the rising power of kingship, queenship, and the Church".[2]

Regarding the chess figures, the historian may take into consideration two elements of significance: (a) The names given to the pieces in various periods and places and (b) their movements on the board, which reveal something on their direct or indirect political and social role and power in the period when the rules were established.[3] The replacement of the vizier by the queen is also a good example for this point. The vizier could only move one step diagonally and this applied originally to the queen as well. But as we know, in time the queen got an almost unlimited specter of movements, thus becoming the most powerful piece on the board. What does it mean in terms of politics? Does it reflect changes in medieval political culture?

Another approach to chess as a lens to study political history is to consider the numerous legends on the origins of the game. One of them, which might be dated back to at least the middle of the eighteenth century, relates chess to the rise of new democratic ideas and ideals. It speaks of an average citizen who was annoyed by the arrogance and violence of a Hindu king and invented the game to teach through it a lesson to the cruel monarch. The lesson was that a king not protected by his state apparatus and his people is weak and doomed to soon meet his end.[4] Independently of whether the legend is original or (most probably) of modern origin, it expresses that the political culture of the period it was composed was tired of uncontrolled monarchy.

A historico-linguistic point should be added here. In some cases, names and terms used for chess pieces are of significance for the political historian (this may be also applied to names of tactics and movements). By studying the names used in various areas and periods for the game, its pieces and parts, its rules and movements, and especially by contextualizing these names, the historian may come up to important conclusions about both the game and the historical entity at

question. In Chapter 1 I presented the name changes the pieces underwent when the game was introduced to the European cultural world, how names of chess pieces were influenced by changes in the political system and thinking after the Russian Revolution in 1917, and a similar effort to change the names of pieces and moves that was undertaken in the USA during the American Revolution.

Finally, the political dimension of chess includes its relation to diplomacy. This relation is to be found very early, in the Persian origin legends of chess. One legend, treasured in a ninth-century Persian source, *The Explanation of Chess and Invention of Backgammon*, presents how chess was introduced to Persia, more concretely to the palace of the "king of kings" Khusraw I Anushirvan (531–579).

> They say that, in the reign of Khusraw of the Immortal Soul, a chess game (16 counters of emerald and 16 counters of red ruby) was sent by Dewisharm, great ruler of the Indians, to test the intelligence and wisdom of the Iranians and to see to his own profit. … In a letter had been written: "Since you are named the king of kings, as king of kings over us all, it is necessary that your wise men be wiser than ours. [It is so] if you explain the rationale of this chess; otherwise you send tribute [and] taxes!"[5]

The story continues with one of the wise men of the Persian palace explaining the rationale of chess as having the meaning of a battle and inventing a new game that the Indian ruler and his wise men would not be able to explain, namely *nard* (backgammon).[6] Independently of whether this legend reflects elements of truth on the actual facts that led to the introduction of chess to Persia and the invention of backgammon, it witnesses on board games as tools of cultural diplomacy, for sure in the ninth century, when *The Explanation of Chess and Invention of Backgammon* was composed, and probably in the previous centuries as well. Furthermore, Ann Gunter notes that luxurious chess pieces owned by kings were also seized as booty. She uses by way of example a chess set now at Topkapi Palace Museum in Constantinople that was a part of the Safavid booty seized by the Ottoman army during the battle of Çaldiran in 1514.[7]

Another approach the historian may adopt in studying chess as a historical source is the cultural. Given that culture is multidimensional, a number of different cultural approaches might be chosen. They all are welcome.

Cultural approach

One of these approaches has been to liken chess to art, due to its elegant movements, its symmetry and beauty, its brilliant combination of countless movements in limited time and within a rule-controlled and competitive environment, its artistic dimension, its aesthetic quality. Reflecting Anatoly Carpov's claim that opened this chapter, Gary Alan Fine analysed chess as art, science and sports.[8] One of his interesting conclusions is that the world has similar features and functions as the chess board.

But the relationship of chess and art is not limited to its gameplay. Chess sets might also be studied as art products representative of the period and the area. To limit myself to just one example, the celebrated Lewis hoard of chessmen is studied (also) from a history of art perspective demonstrating contact and interinfluences in a wide northern geographical area that had a lot of common cultural elements.[9] In addition, chess boards and pieces are excellent sources of material culture, particularly in regards with luxury sets that were owned by royals and members of the highest strata of any given society.

Focusing on the outlook of the board, Fine discusses a feature that is so familiar that we do not pay attention to it: It is black and white. But this was not always the case: The first boards did not have black and white squares. The squares were normally white and divided by thin red or black lines. Later, to make the board friendlier to the players, half part of the squares was painted, in the beginning most probably in red. But in time chess boards were homogenized. Thus, the board copied the black and white colouring of the pieces. The question now is whether this black and white dimension has a symbolic value. Is there any cultural, or other, content of the two colours? Are the symbolic meanings of the colours supposed to be opposite? Could we think that the designers or the players were, consciously or not, thinking about the white colour as representing positive values and powers, while black was representing the opposing negative ones? And if so, what does it mean that it is always the whites that open the "battle", having thus, at least in theory, a lead on the game?

Such a cultural symbolic reading of chess is related to medieval Indian metaphysics and cosmology. In an article published in 1969, Titus Burckhardt claimed that chess, its board and its various versions reflect not only the structure of the Indian army and a battle between two human armies but also crucial elements of Indian metaphysical perceptions of the world in the second half of the first millennium. He refers to the Hindu universe including eight planets, to various symbolisms of the basic numbers represented in the chess board, the gameplay as a combat between the powers of light (*devas*/angels) and the powers of darkness (*asuras*/demons), the cycles of sun and moon, the cyclical nature of time, and the relationship between will/intelligence and destiny/chance.[10]

Another area that the study of chess could illuminate is the development of sociocultural principles and values. In two papers published in 1986 and 2007, the British historian Richard Eales approached chess in medieval Europe in sociocultural terms. Using a variety of sources, both textual and non-textual, he examined the game's reception in Europe and its diffusion geographically and vertically—from a popular and prestigious aristocratic pastime to a knightly activity and skill. An interesting piece of evidence he presents is that chess was in medieval Spain included in the skills of a good knight,[11] which reveals a society (in fact: a social stratum) that appreciated strategic skills. Similar studies could reveal similar and other sociocultural dimensions of chess in other periods and places.

Another way to approach chess as a source for the study of cultural history is to examine how various cultural environments evaluated it and reacted to it.

The most important working question on that is related to the criteria used for the evaluation of chess. In the following passage, notice how Gary Alan Fine presents different approaches used to evaluate chess in different cultures and periods:

> Chess is considered a war game, or at least a game that models warfare or prepares soldiers, although some legendary origins (Myanmar or Sri Lanka) suggest in a more pacifist fashion that the game was developed to provide a less bloody equivalent to conflict. […] When the game spread to the Islamic world, which rejected gambling and gaming, chess was permitted because it was considered preparation for war. In the Soviet Union, the game was treated not as a bourgeois diversion but a form or proletariat culture.[12]

Roger Caillois offers evidence on another civilization, the Chinese, which included chess in the five most important arts a scholar should practice, together with the game of checkers, music, calligraphy, and painting. What is important for us is his point that in the Chinese culture strategy games were evaluated as important media of contemplation and significant for the mental development of a scholar.[13]

Chess is also a valuable witness on cultural transmission, interaction and dialogue. A working question that could function as an interesting starting point is related to what the geographical and cultural diffusion of chess reveal about cultural translation in medieval times. An important piece of evidence is that both the game and theoretical treatises on the game reached Europe exactly because of the Arab conquests, together with other cultural elements, as for example translations of ancient Greek philosophy and medicine and the Arabic numerals.[14] So, chess, as well as other games that were transmitted the same way from Asia to Europe, witnesses on the Arab conquests as an agent of cultural improvement.

How elements of the game got Europeanized or Christianised after the introduction of the game to Europe is the starting point for a new set of working questions on the culturalization of the game.[15] Richard Eales writes that with its perception and spread in medieval Europe, chess reflected on the board "a picture of Western feudal society in miniature", mainly in its terminology which was related to the elements of king, knight and soldier. He adds that "the design of the chess pieces moved gradually in the same direction, producing by the twelfth century miniature figurines which had entirely discarded the inherited Muslim forms in the interests of representation".[16]

Social approach

This last point on the chess board as a reflection of the medieval feudal society functions as the perfect bridge to a social history approach to chess. It is easy to accept that the chess figures, as any figures of any game, reflect the society, in which the game was developed, and of course the societies which adopted the

game and culturalized it according to their own sociocultural norms. But this is not the only relation of chess to social history.

Another useful approach is one that I referred to in Chapter 4, the theory of "soft communities" built around games. In his book *Players and Pawns: How Chess Builds Community and Culture*, Gary Alan Fine uses chess as an example "to understand the complexities of a leisure world, an expansive, knotty world of voluntary action". His effort is "to learn how smaller communities fit into a larger community and how this larger community organizes itself to provide for allegiance and affiliation". He explains that his interest "is not in the games themselves, but what surrounds them in the minds and bodies of players, in their interaction, in the community, and in the interaction orders that make the community possible".[17]

Fine focuses on the present. But chess could also be used this way to study past societies and social groups, presupposed that there exists enough historical evidence to support such a study. Furthermore, by studying which members of the historical entity at question played chess, if there was any restriction as to who had the right to play, or how playing chess was evaluated by the social institutions, the historian can get a clearer picture of hierarchies in the historical entity studied.

Another interesting way to study chess in relation to a given society is to consider how it was evaluated by this society. In some cases, chess was estimated in equal terms with education. In the Middle Ages for example chess was the most favourite pastime (followed by *tables*), particularly among the higher social strata. It was also conceived as a model for education and morality.[18] Another example: In England during the Tudor period (1485–1603) playing chess was included in those knowledge activities that were evaluated as essential for a liberal education.[19]

There were also periods, when playing chess was restricted to the royals, or the aristocracy.[20] The restriction went as far as commoners being punished for playing chess. We also know that many courts had their own chess master who would teach the younger members of the royal family and the families related to the court the art of chess. This also included the female members of the court, as playing chess was one of the most important socializing activities.[21]

Gender and erotic approach

The historical study of chess in sociocultural terms includes a very interesting gender dimension. This is the approach used by Merilyn Yalom in her *Birth of the Chess Queen*. Focusing on the introduction of the queen to the game and her development as a piece, Yalom relates chess to political and social power, to religion and the position of women in all these arenas.[22]

Furthermore, medieval romances witness on women playing chess in the same terms as men,[23] which shows that at least in the highest strata of the society there was a sense of gender equality in pastimes, or at least in some pastime activities.

But this was not always the case. Gender history may also focus on when and where women had the right to play chess and if chess was somehow related to the content and dimensions of male and female identities and roles in any given historical society and period.

Let me add here a methodological point. Various gender or sexual approaches may be applied to the same games resulting in totally different results. One example may suffice: Psychologists following the Freudian tradition have studied chess as "a sublimated form of homosexual eros and parricide" while other psychologists "believe that the unconscious appeal of chess results from oedipal dynamics, leading to sexual and aggressive themes".[24]

From the area of gender, we might now turn to that of erotic history. As strange as it could sound, chess was in medieval times related to erotic love in a number of ways, which will be considered in the following paragraphs.

Speaking about chess in the middle ages, Marilyn Yalom writes that "for a period of four to five hundred years, this game of war was the metaphor of choice for the etiquette of lovers".[25] This is evidenced by both textual and visual sources. It seems that this metaphor was well established in the fourteenth century.[26]

Chess was not just an erotic metaphor. It was also one of the skills a knightly lover had to master. Yalom uses the characteristic example of the troubadour, who, to be a successful one, was expected to be "sophisticated, witty, skilled as a poet, singer, musician, and—let us not forget—chess player".[27]

The metaphor correlating chess to erotic love was in fact setting up a social framework for the unfolding of the erotic practice between the members of the higher social strata, in a medieval society that was based on following social rules and etiquette. Erotic love should be expressed in ways strategically thought and designed. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that erotic love was a battle in which the two people in love had to act as opponents participating in a combat.[28]

Yalom uses the chivalric romances of Tristan and Isolde, and Lancelot and Guinevere as examples of medieval texts that use the metaphor of chess to speak about erotic love.[29] She also studies *The Edifying Book of Erotic Chess* (*Le Livre des Eches Amoureux Moralisés*), a book composed in France around 1400, in which erotic and gender ideas are presented in relation to the game of chess.[30]

But it was not only in literature that chess was an arena for erotic contacts. In medieval times, a time when mingling between the two genres was very limited and difficult, playing chess gave young women the opportunity to meet and communicate with young men who shared the same passion for the game.[31]

In a number of adventures of medieval origin, playing chess is related to what we could call a "wedding-or-death-betting". The motif goes like that: a princess it to marry the one who beats her in a game of chess, while all her opponents she wins over they miss their life. This motif has been the main subject of chivalric romances and pieces of art.[32]

A final point should be made, on the relationship between playing chess and prostitution. As Martin van Creved has claimed, "in both Europe and India […] chess was equally popular among top-of-the-line courtesans eager to attract clients by providing them with more than sex alone".[33] We have every reason to believe, of course, that other games might have served the same goal.

Religious approach

Religious history may also gain from studying chess as a historical source. We may start by reflecting on the reasons why one of the important pieces of the game, the elephant, was transformed into a church figure, the bishop, when the game was introduced to medieval Europe. The bishop reflects the power and influence of the church as one of the most important institutions in medieval times. Merilyn Yalom for example writes that in the period from the tenth through the twelfth centuries, the enormous power of bishops as administrators of the church property but also as owners of private armies, made them close collaborators of the royalty, something that eventually was reflected on the chessboard, where the bishops "replaced" the piece flanking the royal couple.[34]

Indeed, the introduction of the bishop to the board as the piece closest to the royal couple is better understood if we take into consideration the medieval phenomenon of the "fighting bishop": in medieval times the church was an organization often involved in military activities, not only indirectly, by supporting the political powers, but also directly, by having its own armies and participating in battles. This means that the image of a bishop participating in battles was far from unknown in medieval Europe. This probably is the explanation of why the same piece was called either a bishop or a (military) officer.[35]

Another possibility for the historian who would like to use chess as a historical lens is to study the form and the names of chess figures in order to get evidence on whether an area was under Christian or Muslim influence. After the year 1000, when the queen was introduced to the game, in Muslim areas the figure standing next to the king was the vizier, while in Christian areas the queen replaced the male counsellor of the king.

Furthermore, an element of religious history that may be illuminated by the study of chess is the battle for power and influence between political and religious authorities. Let us for example think of Italy and Germany in medieval times, when the chessboard became the arena of such an antagonism. For both the political and the ecclesiastical authority chess was related to morality. The Holy Roman Emperors, on one hand, argued that chess was an edifying recreation. The Roman Catholic Church, on the other, was teaching that playing chess was a path to perdition. As time went on and the game was widespread, the Church became less negative. Some clerics went so far as presenting the game as a symbolic model for the social order[36], while Pope Innocent III wrote around the year 1200 a morality treatise on chess.[37]

Finally, a historian might study the evaluation of chess by religious authorities in various places and periods. Indeed, there were cases when chess was included in the prohibited games and its playing was evaluated a sin. But there are also sources witnessing on chess being tolerated by religion much more than other games. This does not only apply to Christianity. Referring to another religious community in medieval times, the Jews, we may note that while gaming was forbidden to the faithful on the Sabbath, chess was the only game excepted.[38]

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These are just some of the starting points a historian may adopt to study chess as a historical source. Similar approaches and working questions could be used to study any other game, from any period, particularly in relation to strategy games. In any case, the study should be supported theoretically, something that applies to the historical study of any game. A point that any historian should remember is that any similar study is just like a chess game: It demands strategy, skills, patience and attacking your object from different angles.

NOTES

1 On the history of chess, see Eales 2002: 276–308; Murray 1969/1913; Mark 2007; Eales 2007; Shenk 2007; Parlett 1999.
2 Yalom 2004: 26.
3 Such an approach may of course be applied to the study of other games as well.
4 See Reider 2015/1959: 452–453, referring to Lambe 1765.
5 Quoted from Gunter 2004: 139.
6 The legend survives in more Iranian sources, in slightly different versions; see Gunter 2004: 139–148.
7 Gunter 2004: 148.
8 See Fine 2015: 10–16.
9 See Caldwell, Hall & Wilkinson 2009 and Schulte 2017: 17–19 (both with bibliography on the Lewis chessmen).
10 See Burckhardt 1969.
11 Eales 1986: 23 and Eales 2007: 164, referring to the medieval treatise *Disciplina Clericalis*, composed in Spain in the 1120s or 1130s by the converted Jew Petrus Alfonsi.
12 Fine 2015: 3.
13 Caillois 2001: 84.
14 See for example Eales 1986: 16 and Eales 2007: 166.
15 On game culturalization see above, Chapter 3.
16 Eales 2007: 165. See also Serrano 2017.
17 Fine 2015: 213.
18 Reider 2015/1959: 442.
19 Brewster 2015/1971b: 32, footnote 16.
20 Eales 1986: 26.
21 See Reider 2015/1959: 443.
22 Yalom 2004: passim.
23 Eales 1986: 25.
24 Se Fine 2015: 7 and 229 (note 27).
25 Yalom 2004: 123.
26 Yalom 2004: 134; see also Eales 1986: 30–32.

27 Yalom 2004: 125.
28 See Yalom 2004: 127.
29 See Yalom 2004: 128–131.
30 See Yalom 2004: 139–143.
31 See Yalom 2004: 126.
32 See, for example the early thirteenth-century *Huon of Bordeaux*, in which the protagonist plays against the daughter of a king. The wages are his life if he loses or a night with the princess and 100 marks if he wins (Eales 1986: 32).
33 Van Creveld 2013: 280.
34 Yalom 2004: 18.
35 See Gerrard 2017.
36 Yalom 2004: 67–68.
37 Reider 2015/1959: 442.
38 Reider 2015/1959: 443.

9

SID MEIER'S *CIVILIZATION* AS A HISTORICAL SOURCE

In the beginning of the chapter I would like to highlight that I am not a game scholar and I have neither the intention nor the background to enter the vast fields of digital historical game studies[1] and historical representation in digital games[2]. Furthermore, the aim of this chapter is neither to discuss the digital game *Civilization* series as a medium of historical knowledge[3] nor a tool for teaching history.[4] My purpose is the same as in the previous chapters of the book: To reflect on the game as a historical source for the period of its production and for the historical entity that designed and played it. My hope is that the points and approaches presented in the following pages will be useful to historians who study other digital games as historical sources.

Designed by one of the most prominent game designers, Sid Meier, and produced by MicroProse and later Firaxis Games (1991–2016)[5], *Civilization* has been since its release in 1991 a very popular digital historical turn-based strategy game, evaluated just a few years after its publication as "the first bold attempt to simulate the whole of human history in computer software".[6] An interesting feature of the game is that it gives the player the opportunity to create alternative history in relation to real historical figures, as for example famous political leaders.

The game has sold over thirty-seven million units worldwide and resulted in dozens of related websites, a number of open-source clones and spin-offs, as well as public reviews and academic analyses, which makes its consideration a case study of global interest. The fact that the game has been praised for its educational character makes the case even more interesting.

The major scenario of the game is that the player starts from scratch in the year 4000 BC and s/he tries to build up a civilization that will surpass any opponent, be it other civilizations or units of Artificial Intelligence. Each player starts by establishing a small settlement and choosing a historical figure as her/his avatar. Then, the player starts exploring the area around her/his settlement

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to develop her/his unit by expanding the unit's territory and developing science and technology. To win the game, the player should conquer all other civilizations or win the space race by landing first on the star system Alpha Centauri. This may be done in different ways: Military, political, economic or cultural. The gameplay is based on what has been called "4X categories: Explore, expand, exploit, exterminate".[7] Success and win is supposed to be reached in one way: The player must use optimally the so-called "technology tree", or "tech tree", a premade schema of technological development, from stone tools to nanotechnology, that cannot be changed or influenced by the player.[8] The tech tree does not include only technological advances, but also immaterial innovations, in various areas as for example organization, government, philosophy, religion and science. Technological advances give the player the opportunity to produce tools and weapons, found and develop cities and defending structures and construct "World Wonders", as for example the pyramids or a great library. Every version of *Civilization* includes its own encyclopaedia (*Civilopedia*) which provides instructions on various aspects of the game and historical information on persons, peoples, buildings, technologies and practices included in the game.

The company presents the game in these words:

> Originally created by legendary game designer Sid Meier, Civilization is a turn-based strategy game in which you attempt to build an empire to stand the test of time. Become Ruler of the World by establishing and leading a civilization from the Stone Age to the Information Age. Wage war, conduct diplomacy, advance your culture, and go head-to-head with history's greatest leaders as you attempt to build the greatest civilization the world has ever known.
>
> Civilization VI offers new ways to engage with your world: cities now physically expand across the map, active research in technology and culture unlocks new potential, and competing leaders will pursue their own agendas based on their historical traits as you race for one of five ways to achieve victory in the game.[9]

A board game under the same name and similar mechanics was designed by Francis Tresham and published by Hartland Trefoil before Sid Meier's *Civilization*, in 1980. The game, which focused on civilizations around the Mediterranean Sea, was also centred on cultural and technological advance in a scenario of historical development over 8,000 years, starting with ancient civilizations and coming down to the present. Technological advance was in this game also related to an innovative idea, the "technology tree", which became since very popular in board and mainly in digital games. Technology, diplomacy and trade were promoted by the game as more important than warfare as strategies that would help the player win the game.[10]

Sid Meier's *Civilization* is a game that has attracted much attention by game scholars, and it has been debated since its introduction in 1991.[11] *Civilization*, as

any other similar game, might be studied in different ways. In the following, I am focusing on cultural approaches. To avoid misunderstandings, I would like to make once more clear that I define culture as a *way of thinking and acting* that is expressed in the works of individuals or collective entities. This *way of thinking and acting* includes not only the areas usually related to culture (arts, traditions, etcetera), but also (something important for the study of our case here) social interactions and politics. My working question is: What does the study of Sid Meier's *Civilization* series reveal about the cultural profile of the historical entity that produced and played the game?

To answer this question, I will focus on the cultural semiotics of the game, also taking in consideration the work already done by game scholars who tried to decode the cultural principles the game is based on.

I will first consider the political culture reflected in the game. The aim of the game is the establishment of an empire. Two questions are of importance here: Why an empire and not any other political system? And: does the concept "empire" refer to historical empires or to contemporary ones (even if the concept empire is in this case stretched metaphorically), which base their superiority on the combination of military and political power on the one hand and economic superiority on the other? As the latter seems more probable, it is not illogical that the game has been criticized for promoting the USA's model as an ideal, a kind of a metamodern empire.[12]

Another element of political culture is that the player's aim is to "become ruler of the world" in the Information Age. As many other games, *Civilization* lets the player perceive the idea of a world ruler in positive terms, as something that might lead the world to a civilising peak. Apart from the political message included in this aim, there is another problematic dimension, related to the idea of a homogenized civilization as a desirable cultural (and political) aim for the whole world.

Throughout the gameplay it is clear that to become the ruler of the world, the player has to be a competitive leader focusing on antagonism and not to cooperation with the other units/entities of the game. This is made clear by a reference in the game to "competing leaders" who "will pursue their own agendas". This is in fact exactly what the game asks the player to do: To be a competing leader, who will get over any obstacle and any opposition to achieve his/her final aim.

But how will the player reach the aim of developing the most powerful civilization of the world? Well, the usual way in history: S/He is expected to, among other things of course, establish a civilization by waging war and advancing her/his culture. This expectation supports a legitimization of war and a competitive approach to the relationships between civilizations (i.e., cultural and political systems).[13]

The final goal of the player is "to achieve victory". Here lie probably the most debatable elements of the game: Why should the process of civilization would be related to any kind of victory? What does this mean about the background culture the game is based on, about both the producers and the players? Taken into consideration together with the point presented above on the player having

to be competing to achieve her/his goals, this element of the game reflects the tendency of modern Western societies to focus on and appreciate strong determination, competitive goal setting and focus to victory no matter what.

Let me now turn to the organization of societies and cultures in the game and what I am tempted to call the "geography of cultural development". The possible scenarios a player might follow show that the development of cities is in fact promoted by the designers as the only alternative towards the realization of civilization. Development is based on the establishment of towns, cities and metropolises that will at the end dominate their surroundings. This understanding seems to overlook the fact that urbanism is one of the main problems of our times, in social, cultural and economic terms.

I would like to add two cultural points by the Finnish media scholar Frans Mäyrä. The first is related to the theoretical background of the conception of culture in the game: Mäyrä claims that it is based on a historical/cultural theory presented by Arnold J. Toynbee in his twelve-volume *A Study of History* (1934–1961), which presents civilizations as having life cycles similar to those of living organisms. This explains, according to Mäyrä, why the game is built on the master scenario dictating that a civilization has to constantly encounter new challenges and presenting stagnation as a sign of extinction.[14]

Mäyrä's second point is related to the political culture of the game. Namely, he criticizes *Civilization* for its expansionistic mentality. Adopting an expansionistic strategy, exploiting science to advance economically and military and colonising as much as the player can is, according to Mäyrä, the only way to victory. It is not difficult to note that this reflects the political and economic culture of the Western great powers in modern times.[15]

A similar point of criticism is expressed by the Polish anthropologist Kacper Pobłocki, who published in 2002 an article presenting his scepticism on the game.[16] Focusing on culture as an area of expansion, Pobłocki accuses the game of promoting the idea of cultural imperialism. Continuing on the same line, he also claims that the major narrative of the game is in fact the master narrative of globalization. This becomes clear in the fact that "regardless of which civilization we play, the cities still look identical".[17]

Other scholars have claimed that the game might be related to an established colonial mentality based on the opposition between "civilization" and "savagery", according to which specific groups are approached as "barbarian others".[18] The literary scholar Christopher Douglas refers to various local tribes that appear in the game as being in various areas without occupying them and relates this element of the game to the American mythology which "has it that the Americas were essentially empty of inhabitants prior to colonization by European powers". He continues by referring concretely to the Indians, who "exist not as a civilization in their own right, but as an obstacle to be surmounted by civilization". Furthermore, Indian villages do not generate culture, in opposition to the small cities of the "civilized" world, and have to be civilized by the expansion of the territory of the player.[19]

Similar arguments are presented by the media scholar Sybille Lammes, who proposes that *Civilization III* could be understood as a postcolonial game.[20] Lammes also focuses on how the "Barbarians" are presented in the game. Her first point is that "Barbarians are introduced as belonging more to nature than to civilization". Her second point is that the very term barbarian is used in a way that reveals an understanding of it as "a current synonym for savage, inhumane and beastly behavior", which "points to a western mentality in which nomadic behaviour is placed on the periphery of culture as the 'other'". She also notices that the barbarians are grouped in the mechanics of the game together with non-human categories, as for example climate and age.[21]

In the same line of argument, Rebecca Mir and Trevor Owens analyse *Civilization IV: Colonization* (a special version of *Civilization IV,* published in 2008) as promoting "a limited and Americanized colonialist ideology" through its "procedural rhetoric".[22] They continue arguing that the schemes of the game allow for one-directional transmission of culture: From the civilized European colonizers to the primitive natives.[23] They also include a racial element, as the acculturation process is visible in the game not only in the change of the native's clothing, but also in the change of their skin colour.[24]

Let me now turn to a criticism on the cultural theoretical background of the game by Kacper Pobłocki, who claims that the whole concept of the game reflects an understanding of the clash of civilizations as a "major force in history […] defining the existent socio-political order"[25]. By doing so, Pobłocki relates the game to the much-debated homonym cultural/historical theory of Samuel Huntington, which appeared for the first time one year after the publication of the game, in a 1992-lecture.[26] Pobłocki notes that in the first edition of the game (1991) the clash was mainly unfolded in the gameplay in military, economic and technological terms, while from *Civilization II* (1996) the clash became also cultural.[27]

Pobłocki continues by underlining that the game's understanding of historical development is based on concrete social science models, as for example that "a society is a coherent, self-contained unit which moves through standard and abstract stages, each more advanced and complex than the previous one".[28]

When it comes to the historical approach that makes up the major narrative in *Civilization*, this is, not surprisingly, the history of the West. According to Pobłocki, the technology tree of the game reflects European and Northern American history, focusing on the Ancient, Medieval, Industrial and Modern Eras.[29] He also claims that the game promotes the history of the West as "the only logical development of the humankind that would have happened anywhere and anytime, regardless of the initial conditions and player's strategies". Thus, Western success becomes the master narrative of the game.[30]

Civilization seems also to promote an economic and organizational, or managerial, understanding of any kind of development, including the cultural one. As Pobłocki has noted, "the best player is the one who is the best manager",[31] in terms of efficiency, goal setting, productivity and keeping the social order.

Another important point is related to what the game presents as "cultural victory". A player achieves a cultural victory if s/he generates 40,000 points in the so-called "culture score". How is this calculated? Urbanism is one criterion, namely improvements of the cities the player controls. Another criterion is the development of "World Wonders", again in the controlled areas.[32] A third very interesting criterion is that at towards the end of the game, pollution influences negatively the score of the player, underlining one of the major global challenges, in which Western societies play a leading role.[33] A very useful working question for a historian studying the game is: Which are the criteria used by the designers of the game to measure and evaluate "culture"? I would say that they are mainly criteria related to urbanism, technological advance and the material world.

Taking all the above points into consideration, particularly the points on the game promoting the Western culture or the American political mentality and system as the *de facto* only alternatives to success, it is logical to pose the question whether the game reflects a political/cultural practice mentioned in previous chapters, namely what Antonio Gramsci coined as "cultural hegemony". I would like to remind that Gramsci's theory claims that the ruling classes (in this case the ruling civilization or politicocultural area) rule not only by using power but by exercising a hegemony in the cultural sphere.

Even if the concept of cultural hegemony originally addresses issues of ruling within societies, we may use it here as a starting point to discuss *Civilization* as an agent of acculturation and eventually cultural hegemony on global level. I believe it has become clear from what has been presented already that *Civilization* has a narrative that promotes the USA as a political model[34] and the western culture as the only ways to win the game, in other words as the only alternatives to reach the civilization peak. For us, as historians, it is of secondary importance if this is done consciously or it is just the result of an unconscious pro-Western and pro-USA cultural and political bias, or whether the players do embrace and internalize the cultural and political messages of the game.[35] And it does not need any further argumentation that *Civilization* is not the only game including these elements—in fact, I would be very surprised if there is a game produced in the Western world that is not. What is of interest is exactly what the study of the game reveals for the historical period and the historical environment it has been produced and played in. Given that the game is played by millions of people outside the USA and the western world in general, we may assume that one of the effects of playing the game is the adoption of its narrative as (at least) a logical path towards cultural bloom and thus of the western cultural model as the prominent one.

One more point should be added on the technology tree of the game as an element revealing stereotypes on historical development as linear progress based mainly on technological innovation. "Moving up the tech tree" gives the player new abilities and increases her/his chances of winning the game. In relation to the technology tree of *Civilization*, what is of importance for a historical approach to the game is which immaterial technologies are included in it. In all

historical strategy games, technology is not limited to its material dimension, but it includes abstract ideas (as for example religious and philosophical doctrines and ethical systems), social and sociocultural practices, as well as forms of social and political organization (as for example feudalism). The inclusion of such immaterial technology in the game was a conscious choice by the designers.[36] So, which ones are to be found in *Civilization*? And why exactly are these ones? These two could be of many similar working questions that could be applied in a study of the game as historical source.

This is not the right place to consider these questions in depth, but I am tempted to notice that a very strong immaterial technology, not only in *Civilization* but also in other games, in monotheism.[37] Furthermore, apart from immaterial technologies that we should expect to find in any such game, as for example writing or working or civil service, *Civilization* includes technologies like meditation, which is a non-traditional but recently very strong cultural element of the modern Western societies.

The historical study of the game should not limit itself to the game itself. All kinds of reaction to the game should also be taken into consideration. A number of other publications than the ones referred to in this chapter discuss the game from various perspectives and could contribute to its deeper study in historical terms.[38] Furthermore, the efforts of cloning the game in a way that enriches its political and sociocultural possibilities also reveal something about the period in which they were produced.[39]

Finally, changes that have been introduced to the game during its development from its first edition to the last are witnesses on the sociocultural interests and priorities of the American or Western cultural world. One example may suffice: As mentioned earlier, a central element of the game is the "World Wonders". In the first four versions of the game, more than one fifth of them (22%) were located in the USA, while in the sixth version this percentage is decreased to only 3%. A considerable change has also been introduced in relation to the names of some of the non-American wonders. Originally, they were identified with their "international" (i.e. Anglophone) names but in *Civilization VI* they are identified with their original names.[40] These two elements combined reveal an increased respect to the indigenous heritages and languages, reflecting the relevant cultural debate during the recent decades.

So, to answer the working question of this chapter, what we understand for the cultural profile of the historical entity that produced and played Sid Meier's *Civilization* by studying the game is that this is a society that promotes its cultural and political stereotypes related to the well-established self-perception of "the West" as superior to the rest of the world. The historical entity has a political culture friendly to the idea of the strong leader with concentrated and centralized powers, who is expected to be a good technocratic manager. Science and technology are supposed to be central for the development of civilization, while the idea of cultural development is directly related to the model of urbanism. Metaphysically, the cultural background of the game is in favour of monotheism.

Finally, the popularity of the game since its first release and until the present shows, that the global community is still deeply charmed by the historical development of the human being as a form of cognitively valuable entertainment. This is probably the most encouraging message communicated through *Civilization*, not only for us historians but for anyone who understands the importance of historical knowledge and consciousness in life.

NOTES

1 See Chapman, Foka & Westin 2017 and the online journals *Game Studies* (gamestudies.org) and *Games and Culture* (https://journals.sagepub.com/home/gac).
2 Historical representation has two meanings: (a) historical accuracy in a narrative about the past (in our case: in the historical data presented in a game) and (b) historical analysis that is not counterproved by historical and/or theoretical data. On historical representation in games see for example Chapman 2016; Kapell & Elliott 2013; Uricchio 2005; Schut 2007. On historical representation in *Civilization* see Peterson, Miller & Fedorko 2013; Chapman 2013a; Fogu 2009: 115–121; Kapell 2002.
3 See Chapman 2013b.
4 See for example Squire 2004 and Whelchel 2007.
5 The game is running now in its sixth version (see www.civilization.com). Sid Meier's *Civilization* has also been published in a board game version, that has also been very popular since its introduction to the market in 2002 (Eagle Games).
6 Pobłocki 2002: 164.
7 See Ford 2016 (on *Civilization V*) and Myers 2010: 98 (*Civilization II–IV*).
8 On technology trees, see Ghys 2012, which studies *Age of Empires* (Ensemble Studios, 1997), *Empire Earth* (Stainless Steel Studios, 2001), *Rise of Nations* (Big Huge Games, 2003) and *Civilization IV* (Firaxis, 2005).
9 www.civilization.com/news, last visited 5 April 2020.
10 See Woods 2012: 40 and Ghys 2012.
11 See for example Mäyrä 2008: 97–99 (with bibliography).
12 See for example Pobłocki 2002: 166, who, commenting on what he calls "ethnocentric depictions" in the game, writes: "Appearing in a rather erratic manner, and betraying a lack of serious research behind the concepts of the game, are removed from the later versions, yet without changing the very fact that the United States is made the ultimate inheritor of all the human advancement and elevated to the position of the most perfect and most 'civilized' state of all". An example of such an ethnocentric depiction is given on the same page (from *Civilization* III): "Musketeers and Cannon […] ended recurring invasions of barbarians from Asia".
13 On historical strategy digital games as agents of popular culture related to international politics see De Zamaróczy 2017, who studies *Civilization II, III* and *IV, Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings* (Ensemble Studios, 1999), *Europa Universalis II* (Strategy First, 2001), *Europa Universalis III* (Paradox Interactive, 2007), *Medieval: Total War* (Activision, 2002), *Medieval II: Total War* (Sega, 2006), and *Empires: Dawn of the Modern World* (Activision, 2003).
14 Mäyrä 2008: 98.
15 Mäyrä 2008: 98.
16 Published in 2002, Pobłocki's article discusses only the first three editions of the game (*Civilization I, II* and *III*). Although, his points are still valuable for our purpose.
17 Pobłocki 2002: 171, 173.
18 The assumption of "radical otherness" seems to be common in historical strategy digital games; see De Zamaróczy 2017: 164–165.

19 Douglas 2002 (on *Civilization III*); see also Myers 2010: 109–111 (on *Civilization II–IV*).
20 Lammes 2003: 126. Lammes studies *Civilization III* and *Civilization Play the World*.
21 Lammes 2003: 124.
22 Mir & Owens 2013: 91–92. Similar arguments are expressed by Kapell 2002, who studied *Civilization III*. On procedural rhetoric see Bogost 2007: 1–64.
23 Mir & Owens 2013: 99.
24 Mir & Owens 2013: 99–100.
25 Pobłocki 2002: 163.
26 See Huntington 1993 and Huntington 1996.
27 Pobłocki 2002: 171.
28 Pobłocki 2002: 164–165.
29 Pobłocki 2002: 166.
30 Pobłocki 2002: 168.
31 Pobłocki 2002: 168. Managerial dimensions of the game are also discussed in Mir & Owens 2013.
32 Pobłocki 2002: 170.
33 This is an element in which *Civilization* seems to differ from most other historical strategy digital games; see De Zamaróczy 2017: 166.
34 The USAnian model is probably most clearly presented in *Civilization IV: Colonization*. As Mir & Owens 2013: 94 have shown, the only way to win this game is reenacting the USAnian paradigm: colonize, rebel against your mother country and fight a war of independence.
35 See relevant discussions in Carr 2007; Bittanti 2004 (unfortunately, it has not been possible to get access to the latter).
36 Ghys 2012.
37 See Ghys 2012.
38 See for example Voorhees 2009 and Friedman 1997.
39 See for example Mir & Owens 2013: 102.
40 See Mol, Politopoulos & Ariese-Vandemeulebroucke 2017: 217–218.

ENDGAME

What kind of games have you played in your life?

I guess this is a question you have never asked a person you are trying to get to know. I hope that after having read this book you will think of it the next time you will be on a date or you will have a friendly discussion with a new friend or acquaintance. Apart from an icebreaker, a nice opening to a long discussion and a great solution to fight against boredom in social gatherings, this question gives you the opportunity to get to know your interlocutor(s) much better, particularly if it is followed by more clarifying questions. Did you choose these games or were they the only alternatives? Did you like them? What exactly did you like? Whom have you played them with? And how did you play each of them? How important has it been for you to win? Would you cheat to do so? And so forth. Being aware of gaming as a mirror for social, cultural and sociocultural features, also gives you the opportunity to better understand the people you observe playing any kind of games. You are right to expect that they will act or react in more or less the same ways in any other area of "real life".

My main argument in this book is that this also applies to the study of past collective entities. I tried to illustrate the point in three different ways: By relating games as historical sources to two theoretical and methodological areas (Chapters 1–2), by introducing to how games might support the historian in studying past cultural, social, political and metaphysical perceptions and practices (Chapters 3–6), and by presenting three different games as cases studies (Chapters 7–9).

The first chapter of the book focused on examining games and gaming as historical sources through their conceptual dimension. It communicated four main messages. The first is that historians might get access to historical evidence by studying the terms that are used in various periods to name games, game

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pieces or movements, and rules and strategies related to gameplay, or by studying the development of these terms in time and their differences from place to place. This might be done by mapping the terms used and contextualizing them, synchronically or diachronically, and by focusing on one or more historical entities, or one or more games and families of games. The second message is that conceptual consciousness related to games is very important, not only in relation to their use as historical sources but also for the study of games in general. The first step towards such a consciousness is to be aware of the fact that game concepts, as any other type of concepts, change content and meaning when they travel from one period to another, from one place to another and from one environment to another. The third message is that it might prove very productive for the historian to study which social, cultural, political, religious or other concepts are included in a game or its gameplay and why. And the fourth, that it might be equally productive to study how specific concepts are visualized in various games in the same period or in one game over a longer period of time.

Chapter 2 underlined the importance of the materiality of games in historical studies. Its main aim was to invite to theoretical and methodological awareness related to the study of this materiality. The invitation was incorporated in a theoretical example and a methodological proposal. The theoretical example presented one of many relevant theories that could be used in a material study of games as historical sources, namely Giorgio Riello's distinction of three types of material history, namely *History of things, History from things* and *History and things*. Keeping this theory in mind, I proposed a method of nine focal points that might support the material study of any given game set or game piece(s). These points, or steps, are the identification of the piece we study, the identification of its provenance, the analysis of its decoration, the consideration of the elements of visual and textual communication included in it, the study of its function and use(s), the discussion of any gameplay-related design on it, the examination of its known material history and its study as a commodity.

First two chapters have not had the ambition of being exhaustive. Their main aim was to intrigue the historian's interest in studying games from alternative starting points. To the conceptual and material theoretical and methodological approaches proposed here many more could be added. Furthermore, games could be studied from a number of other angles, related for example to the disciplines of anthropology, ethnology, communication, psychology, philosophy, symbology, numerology, statistics or game theory.

The thematic chapters of the book (Chapters 3–6) discussed elements from the history of various games against the background of cultural, political, social, religious and metaphysical history and by using relevant theories to illuminate the empirical evidence. The main aim was to demonstrate how games and gaming could support a historical study of past historical entities in terms of culture, society, politics and metaphysics. But the discussion could not be but selective.

In the area of culture, I decided to focus on games as vehicles of cultural values, arenas of cultural meetings, bearers of cultural memory and tools of cultural hegemony. Indeed games, as for example *Mancala*, have functioned for centuries as media of cultural values that were incorporated in them by their producers and/or their players. In addition, they transported cultural trends from generation to generation. In some cases, games have functioned as passports to enter a specific cultural circle that had made playing these games an activity related to the circle's identity. They are also valuable witnesses on the cultural development known as *civilizing process*, a progress from a lower level of culture to a higher one. Furthermore, games have functioned as arenas of cultural meetings. This has been done mainly in two ways: (a) By the transportation of a game from one cultural environment to another, or (b) when players from different cultural backgrounds played the same games in coincidental or non-coincidental circumstances, as for example while staying for a night in the same inn or serving together in the army as mercenaries. The study of how cultural values related to the rules, or the gameplay, or the aesthetics of the material dimension of the game have crossed cultural borders might prove valuable to the cultural historian as well as to the historian of culture. Games have also served the transportation of cultural memories over time; these memories might be memories of cultural identity, or memories of cultural values and principles of the past. Finally, games have been used in various periods as tools of cultural hegemony or as weapons of resistance to such hegemony. Given the vast dimensions of the area of cultural historical studies, these are but a few ways to approach games as sources of cultural history.

In their relation to social issues, games might be discussed, among other things, as agents of socialization, mirrors of social equality and inequality, or witnesses of ideas and practices related to gendered identity. Closing the chapter dedicated to games as sources of social history, I underlined that the historical study of games in social terms might prove very valuable, particularly in the field of micro-history. Apart from considering it as a mirror of the sociocultural values, principles and priorities of the relevant historical entities, the historian also has the ability of studying games as agents that influenced, directly or not, the social function of these entities. To the areas studied in the relevant chapter, we might add these of education, economy (in its social function) or erotic life. Alternative approaches and theoretical starting points, as for example theories related to the study of social performance, might also be taken into consideration. Independently of starting points and theories used to illuminate the empirical evidence though, the study of games and gaming in past societies is a very valuable tool for the social historian as well as for the historical sociologist.

In the political arena, games have been used time and again as media of visual communication and tools of diplomacy. Apart from studying such uses, the historian might focus on demonstrating how playing games functioned as an arena of "politics from below", or how studying anti-gaming legislation might help us better understand how the authorities regulated, or at least tried to regulate,

the citizens' gaming and gambling activities. In the relevant chapter, I focused on specific cases coming from various periods and different places. But the examples and cases that might be used for a study of politics through games or related to gaming are countless. Equally broad are the theoretical possibilities of analysing the relation between games and politics, probably including more fields in the study, as for example the field of economic development. Finally, games and gaming could be valuable sources for the study of political propaganda in its broader sense, i.e. performed not only by political agents but also by other institutions, as for example religious authorities who used games to promote their influence in the political or social life.

The relationship between games and metaphysics is equally exciting as the relationship of games to politics, social interactions and cultural development. As a historical source, games could support the study of perceptions related to the afterlife already from the ancient times and down to the present. In modern times, games could also be related to studies on the development of occultism and spiritualism, as game equipment (tarot cards being the most celebrated example) was used to foretell the future and seek esoteric wisdom. What is more surprising at first is that games might also illuminate socio-religious history, given that they have been used for millennia as didactic tools to introduce children and adults to various doctrines and moral values and principles. Finally, the study of the relationship between games and religion includes the consideration of the efforts of religious authorities to control gaming by issuing ecclesiastical laws and banning games, mainly games of chance.

In Chapters 7–9 I tried to illustrate the points presented in the thematic chapters of the book by focusing on three different types of games coming from three different periods: the gladiatorial games as a game of physical competition from Antiquity, chess as a medieval strategy board game that has remained extremely popular for almost one and a half millennium, and *Sid Meier's Civilization* as a contemporary digital historical game. I hope that the analysis of the history of these games in relation to theories and methods presented in the book, albeit brief and not exhaustive, has illustrated the richness and importance of games and gaming as carriers of historical evidence. All three cases demonstrate clearly that independently of period and game type, games and gaming are valuable historical sources in terms of shedding light to social structures and interactions, cultural values and principles, practices of executing power and participating in politics, or the communication of perceptions of the past.

Closing this book, I would like to underline once more that what I have presented here is by no means exhaustive. In all the areas presented, i.e., cultural, social, political and metaphysical history, there is a lot more that could be done, not only in relation to periods and games that might be used as case studies, but also in relation to theoretical starting points that could function as the basis for preparing working questions that would examine games as sources for the study of various periods and historical entities in very different ways. *Games of History* is in fact an invitation for a more thorough study of games as historical sources.

I have presented specific thematic areas of study, a limited number of examples and just a few theoretical and methodological approaches that could support such a study. Games are not only charming but also important alternatives as starting points in the study of the past. Indeed, they cannot be the main sources of the historians, unless there is no alternative. But they often offer empirical evidence that is not to be found in any other source type. So, I am closing this book in hope that future historical studies will show the world of games and gaming more attention, the attention it truly deserves.

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