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BOARD GAMES EQUIPMENT FROM ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXTS IN ARCHAIC ATTICA

Dimitris Paleothodoros
University of Thessaly
palaio@uth.gr

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

Board games, gaming tables, die, funerals, Attica

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

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πρώτου τρίτου του 6ου αιώνα π.Χ., μια περίοδο πόλωσης μεταξύ της αριστοκρατίας και του υπόλοιπου αθηναϊκού πληθυσμού.

Επιτραπέζια παιχνίδια, τράπεζες παιχνιδιών, ζάρι, ταφικά, Αττική

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

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

Introduction

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

Dice are by no means a conspicuous item of the archaeological record in Greece and there is no comprehensive account of finds that I am aware of. In general, they appear in four types of archaeological contexts: in public areas of commercial interest, in domestic assemblages, in sanctuaries, and in burials. Most of the finds belong to the first category, especially those from

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

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

Corinth and the Agora of Athens, dating from the 5th century BC down to the late Roman period. Several finds of dice probably came from gambling houses or taverns, such as the group of seven bone dice from a well in the Athenian Agora, dating to the 3rd century AD. Other finds are reported from the harbours of Mytilene and Antikyra in Phokis.[3] All these dice were apparently used for gambling, which is otherwise documented by three inscribed lead tablets of the Archaic period from a deposit in Corfu bearing references to debts in dice games, and by countless literary references.[4]

The earliest find from a domestic context is a pair of limestone dice from Lefkandi discovered in a trench containing archaic material, although the excavators consider it possible that the dice date to the late 8th century. If their suggestion is true, then this is the earliest occurrence of dice in Greece after the Bronze Age.[5] Other finds from houses are reported for Archaic Oropos in Attica and Krousson in Crete, Late Archaic Stagira in Thrace and Chios in the Aegean, 4th century Olynthus, Hellenistic Corfu, Delos and Sparta, as well as Roman Kastelli in Crete and Megalo Gardiki on Kastri Hill in Epirus.[6] Dice have also been found in buildings with a military

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

[4] DIPHILUS, fr. 74; LYS. 16.9-21; CRATINUS, *Pytine*, fr. 208; AESCHIN., *In Tim.*, 1, 4; ISOC., *Antid*, 15, 287. Corfu tablets: CALLIPOLITIS 1961, 126-128, pl. 77a. Dice rolls are mentioned in an Attic defixio from Phaleron, binding the owners of a tavern: LAMONT 2015, 170.

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

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

function, as for example in Phyle in Attica, Early Byzantine Edessa in Macedonia and various locations of the late Classical and Hellenistic Thrace.[7]

Finds from sanctuaries first appear in the 7th century. The list of sites includes the Acropolis of Athens, the Eleusinian sanctuary of Eleusis, the sanctuary of Artemis in Brauron, the sanctuary of Athena Pallene and another for an unknown deity in modern Gerakas; the sanctuaries of Artemis Limnatis in Messenia, Artemis Orthia near Sparta, Hermes in Laconian Aigies, Pan in Arcadian Kotylos, Delphi, the Korykeian Cave, a sanctuary dedicated to a female deity in Vryokastraki off Kythnos, a portico facing a Classical temple in Kephallonia, the sanctuaries of Athena Lindia in Rhodes and Diomedes on the island of Palagruza in the Dalmatic coast.[8] Although playing dice is an activity attested for sanctuaries,[9] most of the objects must be regarded as offerings.[10]

Dice in tomb contexts appear for the first time in Eleutherna, Central Crete. A single pottery die in the area K of rich family funerary pyres[11] cannot be associated with a specific burial. All the cremated individuals are adults, males and females whose ages range from 19 to 55 years. The tombs

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

[8] GRAEF – LANGLOTZ 1925, 259, nos. 2694-2696 (Acropolis); KOKKOU-VIRIDI 1999, 253, Γ26, pl. 36 (Eleusis), Papadimitriou 1959, 19, pl. 15c (Brauron); AD 54, B1 (1999), 107 (Pallene); AD 60, B1 (2005), 132, 134, fig. 30 (Gerakas); KOURSOUMIS 2014, 201, fig. 11 (Limnatis); DAWKINS 1929, 237. pl. 166, no. 1 (Orthia); BONIAS 1998, 94, 207, no. 520, pl. 61 (Aigies); *ArchEph* 1903, 179 (Kotylos); DEONNA 1938, 332, n. 1 (Delphi); JACQUEMIN 1984, 170, no. 13, fig. 13 (Korykeian cave); ALEXANDROS MAZARAKIS-AINIAN, pers. comm. (Vryokastraki, pottery die of Archaic date); AD 56-59, B5 (2001-2004), 180 (Kephallonia); BLINKENBERG 1931, 157, no. 475, pl. 17 (Lindos); KIRIGIN – JOHNSTON – VUČETIĆ – LUŠIĆ 2009, 141 (Palagruza). Finds from Naucratis (THOMAS 2017, 16, n. 172-177, Archaic to Roman) and Tell Defenneh (LECLÈRE – SPENCER 2016, 87, 6th century BC) in Egypt could either come from sanctuaries or from secular buildings.

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

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

[11] STAMPOLIDIS 1990, 390, fig. 19.

are dated from the 9th to 7th centuries BC by the associated ceramic material; the date of the die cannot be established with accuracy, but the stratigraphy of the excavation points to the later period of occupation of the burial plot, in the late 8th to 7th centuries BC.

1. Gaming Tables

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

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

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

[13] SABETAI 2009, 296.

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

[15] In CALLIPOLITIS 1963, 124, n. 15.

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



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



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



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

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

There are two more 7th century dice with painted decoration, both of unknown context. The first is stylistically close to the Ram-Jug Painter, an artist working during the 2nd quarter of the century, in the so-called Black- and White Style (Fig. 3).[17] Particularly noteworthy is the face showing number three: instead of putting the three holes in a line across the upper right and lower left corners, the painter designed three asymmetrical holes flanking the forepart of a horse. Some slight damage was done to the human face drawn in outline on the face bearing number two, with one hole drilled into the human's neck. Semni Karouzou identified the bearded man as Palamedes,[18] the mythical inventor of dice and games, but the hypothesis lacks substantial foundation. Six is also peculiar, with the holes arranged in an almost circular pattern with uneven intervals. The other seventh century die, also kept in the National Museum of Athens bears linear and floral decoration, but no images.[19] It is close in style and type of decoration to the Anavyssos die mentioned above.

The placing of a gaming table and a single die in a funerary pyre was a rite repeated in the Kerameikos several decades later.[20] Both finds come from the so-called Opferplatz Ξ, an offering place containing material associated with a primary cremation burial. The table (Fig. 4) is of exactly the same type as the Vari specimen, except that all the mourners in this case face in the same direction, performing different gestures (although this could be a restorers' decision since the mourners are not fixed on the table). The horizontal plaque, roughly square in shape, is largely lost, but enough remains to establish that it was divided into five areas by parallel lines. Both feet of the table are preserved, bearing figures of lions in Corinthianizing black-figure, typical of the years just after 600 BC. The foot of yet another example (15 cm. high) with a lion turning its head to look back depicted in an elaborate black-figure style is kept in the British Museum.[21]

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[17] Athens, National Archaeological Museum 19366: KAROUZOU 1973, pl. 53-55.

[18] KAROUZOU 1973, 59.

[19] Athens, National Archaeological Museum: KAROUZOU 1973, pl. 56.

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

[21] London 1947, 0516.1 (found or acquired in Athens): https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.as



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

The best-known model of a game board was acquired in 1882 by the National Museum in Copenhagen from a dealer in Athens.[22] There is no doubt that it once belonged to an Attic funerary context. It is composed of numerous fragments, and some modern restorations in plaster are noted in the relevant publication. Its shape is different from the examples examined thus far: the upper surface is divided by nine incised lines with oval knobs at the ends, while two pottery dice are attached near the edges of each narrow side; perhaps a third one was placed in the middle of the board. Since the two surviving dice display the side bearing number six, it has been suggested that the missing one was also resting with the uppermost side showing the

px?objectId=429199&partId=1&searchText=1947&images=true&page=18 (retrieved 13.4.2018).

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

same number, so that the three would form a variant of the "lucky roll" of three sixes, the so-called "Fair Aphrodite",[23] which however probably made no sense in a board game. This roll is represented on the curious triple ivory dice found in rich tombs of late Archaic Etruria.[24] The oval knobs on each end of the incised lines probably represent the gaming pieces. A recent examination of the Copenhagen gaming table led to an alternative reconstruction, namely that the central square space marks the spot where a statuette was placed.[25] This is in line with Ulrich Schädler's hypothesis about the *Five Lines* game having been played with a single die, based on the evidence from the Vari and Kerameikos tables, while variants using more lines, usually 9 or 11 (as in the case of the Copenhagen board and two Etruscan mirrors),[26] required two dice. The board is atop some kind of box, which rests on two feet running across the narrow sides. Each long side is decorated with three waterbirds and each short side with two similar birds and rosettes, executed in the careless style associated with the work of the Ragusa group,[27] a provincial Attic workshop active during the first quarter of the 6th century BC.[28]

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

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

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

[25] SCHÄDLER 2009a, 180-181.

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

[27] BOARDMAN 1998.

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

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



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

The table was inadequately published, since it has been wrongly identified (as an offering table), wrongly dated (to the first half of the 7th century) and misattributed (to the Protocorinthian fabric).[30] It is interesting to note that the report also mentions a statuette of a mourner. In light of Schädler's suggestion that the square area marked out in the central part of the Copenhagen table,[31] in the centre of the so-called "sacred line"[32] was the base of a statuette, it becomes evident that the mourner belongs with the table. The excavators wrongly associated it with the high foot cup decorated

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

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

[32] On the sacred line, see now KIDD 2017.

with a female protome[33] and it has consequently not been integrated into the table in the Brauron Museum.

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



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

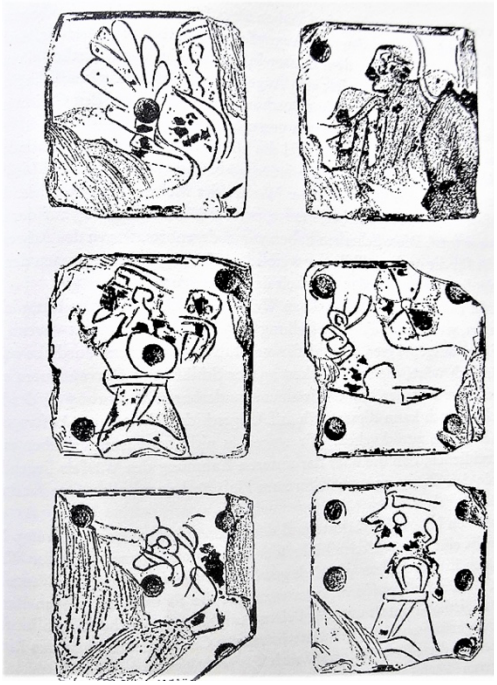


Figure 7: Black-figured pottery die from the Acropolis of Athens. Athens, Acropolis coll. 2696. After GRAEF – LANGLOTZ 1925, 259.

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

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

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

2. Dice

It comes as no surprise that the same provincial Attic group also produced dice in the black-figured technique. Four are known to me: the first, once in the Vlasto collection and now on display in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens, probably came from a tomb in Sounion,[35] undoubtedly one of those excavated in the area in the beginning of the 20th century. Each side is decorated with a waterbird flanked by black blobs of paint; those blobs render the holes representing the numerals practically invisible. Another specimen, almost identical to the one in the National Museum, is in Heidelberg (Fig. 6).[36] The faces are almost square, measuring 3.7 by 3.9 cm. Here, the numbers are more easily decipherable; the decoration is very similar, with large, unappealing waterbirds occupying each side of the cube. A die from Brauron, attributed to the same group, depicts lions and panthers.[37] It was found along with a specimen decorated with a carefully drawn rosette sometimes shown on early 6th century Attic vases.[38] The last specimen has a well-established context, since it was found on the Acropolis.[39] Its six faces are occupied by lions, sphinxes and women, subjects not only familiar from other dice and gaming tables of the same period, but also popular in the repertory of the Ragusa Group (Fig. 7).

[35] Athens, National Archaeological Museum BS 95: GADOLOU – KAVVADIAS 2013, 21.

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

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

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

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

Dice appear in a number of other Archaic and Classical tombs and pyres, for example in Phaleron,[40] Athens,[41] Eretria, Boeotia,[42] Sindos, Maroneia, Olynthus, and Taranto.[43] Many more finds from the late Classical and Hellenistic periods are known.[44] On the other hand, gaming boards have been excavated in a variety of localities. An earlier list provided by Kendrick Pritchett, revised by Ulrich Schädler[45] and supplemented here with a handful of new finds,[46] enumerates stone and terracotta tables from sanctuaries (Perachora, Epidaurus, Amphiaraeion at Oropos, a sanctuary at Tempi in Thessaly), houses (Ambracia) and public areas (Acropolis of

[40] Pers. comm. Anna Alexandropoulou.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Goritsa in Thessaly, a well of a shop in the South Stoa of Corinth). To these, we should add boards engraved on the upper surface of the steps in sanctuaries (the Acropolis, the Propylaea of the Eleusinian sanctuary, the Letoon in Delos) and other stone constructions (on a rock on the Acropolis of Pharsalos and on the Justinianian wall in Corinth).[47] The latter serves as a reminder of the fact that board games were played in the public space, as is attested by a couplet in Euripides' *Medea*, referring to the elder Corinthians playing πεσσοί in the area of the fountain Peirene and the existence in Athens of a public square called Πεσσοί, mentioned in a fragment by the comic poet Cratinus (fr. 7 K-A). Significantly, aside from the Attic examples, there are no finds from funerary contexts. This is a crucial point in itself, although we cannot rule out the possibility that boards of perishable material were used as grave goods.[48]

To sum up the Attic evidence: gaming boards with a single pottery die have been discovered in the Vari and Kerameikos cemeteries, while the Copenhagen table has a pair of dice attached to the top surface. No dice are mentioned in the publication of the Merenda table, while the contexts of the La-Tour-de-Peilz table and the London foot are lost. On the other hand, painted dice are found in both tombs (Sounion and the examples in the National Museum of Athens) and sanctuaries (the Acropolis and Brauron), without any connection to gaming boards. Thus, isolated dice may be associated either with gambling or board games, the former being an activity invariably coloured with negative overtones in literature,[49] the latter

[47] DUNBABIN 1963, nos. 1326-1327 (Perachora; not for the *Five Lines* game); PRITCHETT 1968, 190-193, nos. 1-10 (Epidaurus, Amphiaraeion in Oropus and a well in Corinth); VITOS – EXARCHOU 2015, 38, fig. 4d (Tempi, engraved on a Laconian tile of the Hellenistic period); AD 54, B1 (1999), 468 (Ambracia, Hellenistic); VITOS – EXARCHOU 2015, 38, fig. 4a (Goritsa); VROOM 1999, 102, pl. IV-V (Eleusis); PRITCHETT 1968, 195-96, no. 13, pl. 5, 2-4; SCHÄDLER 2009a, 182-183, fig. 6-8 (Letoon of Delos); VITOS – EXARCHOU 2015, 38, fig. 4b (Acropolis of Pharsalos); AD 52, B1 (1997), 339, pl. 141b (Corinth, early Byzantine). Context unknown or unspecified: IGNATIADOU 2016, 130, fig. 1 (Abdera); SCHÄDLER 2009a, 182 (Eretria); PRITCHETT 1968, 193, pl. 4.1 (Salamis).

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

[49] Lys. 14.27 (Alcibiades' son "dicing away" his father's fortune), 16.9-21; Aeschin., *In Tim.*, 1.42; Theopomp., *FGrH*, 115 F 49 and Ar., *Plut.*, 243 (both connecting gambling and whore-hunting) Hor., *Carm.*, 3.24.54-8. Playing dice as a shameful activity: Xenophanes,

usually considered as representing positive values.[50] However, since most examples of black-figured dice and gaming tables are by a single painter, they were more probably conceptually linked, although to that date, no gaming table by the Ragusa group was found in the same tomb with a die. This may be a coincidence, or the tables in question might have been accompanied by wooden dice that were fully burned in the pyre. Finally, it seems plausible to accept that the symbolic value assigned to board games in connection with those funerals was sufficiently expressed by the funerary use of the table and did not further require the destruction of a die.

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

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fr. A16 DK apud Plut., *Mor.*, 530e. Dice-addiction: Ar., *Vesp.*, 75; [Hippocrates], *Humors* 9.2. See now VESPA 2020a.

[50] KURKE 1999, 259-261.

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

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

[53] KEFALIDOU 2004.

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

[55] On the distribution, see BOARDMAN 1998.

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

It is now time to address the question of the function and symbolism of gaming tables and dice in funerary contexts in the 7th and early 6th century Attica. Emily Vermeule argued that in some areas of Greece, gaming became "a metaphor of chance, of winning and losing in an unreal world, the ultimate game with the last opponent".[56] She further believed that the presence of game boards in tombs betrays Egyptian influence. This of course is in line with the famous assertion by Plato that dice, among writing and various mathematic arts, were invented by the Egyptian god Thoth,[57] as well as with the preeminence of the game *Senet* in Egyptian funerary contexts.[58] This idea was further elaborated by Sarah Morris and John Papadopoulos, who also made a series of pertinent observations on the possible Late Geometric connection of games to funerals.[59] However, given the scarcity of dice in the archaeological record before the Greco-Roman period in Egypt,[60] and the abundance of similar finds in the Near East,[61] oriental influence might also be at play here.[62]

Donna Kurtz and John Boardman suggested that the addition of the mourners made the gaming boards of Vari and Kerameikos look like biers, thus making their inclusion to the goods offered to the deceased more appropriate.[63] Kurtz points out that the practice is exclusively Attic.[64] Other scholars regarded gaming equipment in tombs as "an essential or at least desirable adjunct to a pleasurable existence in the other world",[65] based on a fragment of Pindar (fr. 129.66), where it is said of the pious in Hades:

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

[57] Pl., *Phdr.*, 274c-d.

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

[59] MORRIS – PAPADOPOULOS 2004, 232-236.

[60] BRERI – BEN-YOSEF 2010, 417-418.

[61] BRERI – BEN-YOSEF 2010, with references.

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

[63] KURTZ – BOARDMAN 1971, 78.

[64] KURTZ 1984, 318.

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

"some take delight in horses and exercises, others in πεσσοί, and others in lyres, and among them complete happiness blooms and flourishes". Needless to say, Pindar's passage quoted by Plutarch and partly preserved in a papyrus fragment, came down to us without its proper context; as S. Morris and J. Papadopoulos aptly observed, there is nothing in the extant Greek literature to suggest that the idea of a happy afterlife connected to board games was widespread.[66]

To be sure, Pindar's passage connects daily experience of the pious in the afterlife with the pleasures of aristocratic life. In speaking about friendship, Aristotle (*Ethics* 1114c) similarly comments: "some friends drink together; some play dice together; others practice gymnastics together and hunt together or philosophize together". Helène Whittaker's thorough comparative analysis has shown that the general cosmological assumption that "life is a game" underlying the connection between board games and death must be coupled with an interpretation linking elite status to playing board games.[67] In fact, Plato observes that skill in board games requires leisure,[68] and leisure is for the wealthy, those who do not spend their time working for their living. The tragedians and other ancient authors who list Palamedes' inventions, cite board games and dice as a painless pastime for leisure moments, a pleasant cure of idleness, along with culturally significant inventions (from three meals a day to military tactics, counting, measures and weights).[69] At the same time, board games are a serious activity, requiring skill and strategic thought, and thus they are largely reserved for adults.[70] Dice and gaming tables are also connected to the banquet: this is evident in the portrayal of the suitors playing in Homer's *Odyssey*, in several fragmentary passages by comic poets[71] and the carving of a game board on

[66] MORRIS – PAPADOPOULOS 2004, 236.

[67] WHITTAKER 2004, 285-286.

[68] Pl., *Phdr.*, 274d. See also Pl., *Resp.*, 2, 374c. On Plato's views about games, see DASEN 2020, 100-104.

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

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

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

the right pilaster of the Tomb of the Reliefs in Cerveteri,[72] otherwise presented as a fully equipped banquet room with couches, thrones and an abundance of sympotic material.

Conclusion

Board-games and dice seem to be firmly located within an elite space in the 7th and early 6th century Attica. Such a reading requires a retrospective interpretation, that is, to assume that the gaming equipment refers to the past life and status of the deceased, rather than to the prospects of a happy afterlife.[73] The act of placing dice and board games in burials is as much a religious as an ideological statement. In fact, whenever we are able to define the status of the owner of the tomb, he is clearly marked as a member of the elite by his inclusion in the very small percentage of the Attic population receiving special burial treatment in the form of primary cremation accompanied by placing offerings in trenches or pits (Vari, Kerameikos, Merenda). The objects are of no significant intrinsic value. It may be argued that in the first half of the 7th century, the period when the Vari table was deposited, playing board games was enough of a novelty in Greece for the inclusion of a table in a burial to underline the exclusive privileges of the elite in partaking to higher culture and leisure activities. However, most of the objects studied here date from the first two decades of the 6th century. The potters and painters of the Ragusa Group and of other workshops which produced the examples from the Kerameikos, Anavyssos and the British Museum, looked back to a tradition established by the mid-7th century gaming table and die from Vari, the die from Anavyssos and the dice without provenance in the National Museum of Athens. This is precisely the period when the polarization between the *aristoi* and the *plèthos*, the undifferentiated mass of underprivileged citizens, within Athenian society starts to wane out, with the reforms of Solon and the advent of a new wealthy class engaged in handicraft and trade. Afterwards, board games ceased to be regarded as an exclusively aristocratic domain;[74] gaming tables

[72] LOVERGNE 2022, in press.

[73] WHITTAKER 2015, 289.

[74] The vases showing Ajax and Achilles playing the game of *Five Lines* (usually in the presence of Athena) on Attic black- and red-figured vases are sometimes taken (e.g. SCHÄDLER 2009a, 176) as evidence for the continuation, albeit with a different media, of the practice of furnishing Athenian tombs with gaming equipment. On the funerary connotations of the subject, see further VERMEULE 1979, 81-83; MORRIS –

are now incised on steps and pavements of sanctuaries and marketplaces for everyone's use, while the work of philosophers from Protagoras to Plato and Aristotle provides ample evidence that by the 5th century a mental connection between board games and civic values was established.[75] Elsewhere, in 5th century Etruria and 4th century Macedonia, gaming counters and dice continued to serve as indicators of elite and gender status, being mostly discovered in tombs of warriors and boys.[76]

PAPADOPOULOS 2004, 235; WHITTAKER 2004, 292. Besides the chronological gap of nearly 30-40 years between the latest painted gaming boards and dice (580-570 BC) and the earliest vases (540 BC), one might stress that most of the vases in question have been exported to Etruria, where gaming iconography starts at an early date and is independent of Attic models (CERCHIAI 2008, 92-94, fig. 2-4). Vases with the subject have also been found in sanctuaries (Acropolis, Selinus, Marzabotto). Note also the occurrence of the subject on shield bands from Olympia and Aegina (KUNZE 1950, 142 f.). The only shape with this iconography to be found in Greek tombs is the black-figured lekythos, but these vases date later, in the early 5th century BC. There are many other interpretations beyond the one stressing the funerary character of the imagery (political allusions to Peisistratid Athens, the agonistic ethos of the elites, allusions to cleromancy, etc.) See BOARDMAN 1978; WOODFORD 1982; KURKE 1999, 261; SCHÄDLER 2009b; BRUNORI 2011; MARISCAL 2011; DASEN 2015; BALDONI 2017. For a curious variant, where both heroes (named in inscriptions) kneel before Athena, but without the gaming table between them, see IOZZO 2018.

[75] DASEN 2020, 103-104.

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

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