

BOARD GAMES IN ANCIENT FICTION: EGYPT, IRAN, GREECE

Ioannis M. Konstantakos

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

iokonstan@phil.uoa.gr

Abstract. Board games are often used as a plot motif in modern genre fiction, especially in detective and adventure stories. In these types of narrative, a well-known pattern of storytelling or literary structure (e.g., the treasure hunt, the detection of serial crimes, the initiatory course, or the medieval tale collection) is reworked and adapted to the rules and phases of a board game such as chess, *jeu de l'oie*, or the tarot card pack. This literary practice is very ancient and may be traced back to a number of novelistic compositions of the ancient Near East, dating from the 1st millennium BC to late antiquity. In the Demotic Egyptian *Tale of Setne Khaemwaset*, from the Saite period, the protagonist Setne plays a board game (probably *senet*) with the mummy of a long dead and buried magician, in order to gain a powerful book of spells. The widespread Near-Eastern story-pattern of the magical competition is here superimposed on the procedure of a celebrated Egyptian game. In a late Hellenistic Greek novella inspired by the *Odyssey* (Apion of Alexandria, *FGrH* 616 F36) Penelope's suitors play an elaborate game of marbles (*petteia*) in order to determine which one of them will marry the queen. This is a playful rewriting of the famous bow contest of the Homeric epic. A Sasanian novelistic work, the *Wizānīšn ī čatrang*, adapts the age-old legend of the riddle contest of kings; the riddles are replaced with board games (chess and backgammon), which the opponents invent and propose to each other as difficult puzzles for solution. In all these texts the board game becomes a central symbol of the transformative and innovative power of literary narrative.

©2022 Ioannis M. Konstantakos. This is an open access article licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Published with the support of the European Research Council (ERC) in the framework of the ERC Advanced project *Locus Ludi. The Cultural Fabric of Play and Games in Classical Antiquity* based at the University of Fribourg (CH) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 741520).

Games in literature; narrative; magical contest; riddle contest; wooing contest

Περίληψη. Τα επιτραπέζια παιχνίδια χρησιμοποιούνται συχνά ως μοτίβο της πλοκής στη σύγχρονη μυθοπλασία, ιδίως σε είδη όπως οι αστυνομικές και οι περιπετειώδεις ιστορίες. Σε αυτές τις μορφές αφήγησης κάποιο γνωστό αφηγηματικό σχήμα ή πρότυπο λογοτεχνικής δομής (π.χ. το κυνήγι του θησαυρού, η διαλεύκανση κατά συρροήν εγκλημάτων, η μυητική πορεία, η μεσαιωνική συλλογή ιστοριών) υφίσταται επανεπεξεργασία και προσαρμόζεται στους κανόνες και στα στάδια ορισμένου επιτραπέζιου παιχνιδιού, όπως το σκάκι, το παιχνίδι της χήνας ή η τράπουλα του ταρό. Αυτή η λογοτεχνική πρακτική είναι πολύ αρχαία. Μπορεί να ανιχνευθεί ήδη σε μυθιστορικές συνθέσεις της Εγγύς Ανατολής, από την πρώτη χιλιετία π.Χ. έως τη μεταγενέστερη αρχαιότητα. Στη δημοτική αιγυπτιακή *Μυθιστορία του Σέτνε Χαεμουάσετ*, από τη σαϊτική περίοδο, ο πρωταγωνιστής Σέτνε παίζει επιτραπέζιο παιχνίδι (πιθανότατα *σενέτ*) με τη μούμια ενός από καιρό πεθαμένου και θαμμένου μάγου, με στόχο να κερδίσει ένα ισχυρό βιβλίο με ξόρκια. Εδώ το διαδεδομένο μεσανατολικό αφηγηματικό πρότυπο του αγώνα μαγείας προβάλλεται πάνω στη διαδικασία ενός περίφημου αιγυπτιακού παιχνιδιού. Σε μια ελληνική νουβέλα από την όψιμη ελληνιστική εποχή, εμπνευσμένη από την *Οδύσσεια* (Απίων ο Αλεξανδρεύς, *FGH* 616 F36), οι μνηστήρες της Πηνελόπης παίζουν περίτεχνο παιχνίδι πεσσών για να καθορίσουν ποιος από όλους τους θα παντρευτεί τη βασίλισσα. Αυτή η διήγηση ξαναγράφει με παιγνιώδη τρόπο τον διάσημο αγώνα τοξοβολίας του ομηρικού έπους. Ένα σασανικό μυθιστορικό κείμενο, το *Wizārišn ī ċatrang*, διασκευάζει τον παμπάλαιο θρύλο του διαγωνισμού γρίφων μεταξύ βασιλέων. Οι γρίφοι αντικαθίστανται από επιτραπέζια παιχνίδια (σκάκι και τάβλι), τα οποία οι αντίπαλοι εφευρίσκουν και προτείνουν ο ένας στον άλλον σαν δύσκολα προβλήματα προς επίλυση. Σε όλα αυτά τα κείμενα το επιτραπέζιο παιχνίδι γίνεται κεντρικό σύμβολο της μεταμορφωτικής και ανανεωτικής δύναμης που έχει η λογοτεχνική αφήγηση.

παιχνίδια στη λογοτεχνία· αφήγηση· αγώνας μαγείας· αγώνας γρίφων· αγώνας μνηστείας

Riassunto. I giochi da tavolo vengono spesso utilizzati come elemento della trama nella letteratura di genere moderna, in particolare in racconti polizieschi e in storie di avventura. In questi tipi di racconto, uno schema narrativo ben noto o qualche struttura letteraria (per esempio, la caccia al tesoro, la rilevazione di crimini seriali, il corso iniziatico o la collezione di racconti medievale) vengono modificati ed adattati alle regole ed alle fasi di un certo gioco da tavolo, come gli

scacchi, il gioco dell’oca o il mazzo di carte dei tarocchi. Questa pratica letteraria è molto antica e può essere fatta risalire a un gruppo di composizioni novellistiche dell’antico Vicino Oriente, che datano dal primo millennio a.C. fino all’antichità tarda. Nella cosiddetta *Storia di Setne Khaemwaset*, un’opera in egiziano demotico del periodo della Dinastia Saitica, il protagonista Setne gioca (probabilmente a *senet*) contro la mummia di un mago da lungo tempo morto e sepolto, al fine di ottenere un libro di potenti incantesimi. Il diffuso schema vicino-orientale della competizione di magia viene qui sovrapposto alla procedura di un celebre gioco degli Egizi. In una novella greca dall’età tardo-ellenistica, che è stata ispirata dall’*Odissea* (Apione di Alessandria, *FGH* 616 F36), i pretendenti di Penelope giocano una partita complicata di pedine (*petteia*) al fine di determinare chi di loro sposerà la regina. Questa storia è una riscrittura scherzosa della famosa gara di arco dell’epica omerica. Un’opera novellistica sassanide, il *Wizārišn ī ʿatrang*, rielabora la remota leggenda della gara di enigmi tra due re, sostituendo gli enigmi con giochi da tavolo (gli scacchi e il *backgammon*). Gli avversari inventano i giochi e li propongono l’uno all’altro come difficili rompicapi da risolvere. In tutti questi testi il gioco da tavolo diventa un simbolo centrale del potere trasformativo e innovativo della narrativa letteraria.

Giochi in letteratura; narrativa; gara di magia; gara di enigmi; gara di corteggiamento

1. Board games and literature: A long-lasting love affair

All the world’s a board,
and all the men and women merely players;
they have their pawns and dice and make their moves,
and one man in his time plays many games.
We are such stuff as toys are made on,
and our little life is played out on a board.¹

¹ I combine and parody two famous passages by William Shakespeare: “All the world’s a stage, / and all the men and women merely players: / They have their exits and their entrances; / and one man in his time plays many parts” (*As You Like It* 2.7.139-142); “We are such stuff / as dreams are made on, and our little life / is rounded with a sleep” (*The Tempest* 4.1.156-158).

If I paraphrase Shakespeare in this manner, it is not because I would turn the bard into an aficionado of board games. Rather, I wish to draw attention to the long-standing love-affair between table games and literature, an intense relationship of exchange and mutual fertilization, which has been pursued since very ancient times.

The playing of games has provided the subject-matter for memorable scenes in narrative and dramatic works, full of passion and suspense, emotion or terror. Who can forget the tender *partita* of chess played by the young enamoured couple, Ferdinand and Miranda, in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (5.1.172-175)? The graceful game functions as a visual analogue of the delicate play of love in which the two young persons are engaged.² A very different confrontation over the chessboard occurs in Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*, when the knight challenges the pale-faced Death to a chess match, so as to gain time and postpone his inevitable end.³ Of course, Death is always the winner; in I. Bergman's bleak existential worldview, life is an intricate game against an opponent who cannot be beaten. In modern novels, such as Stefan Zweig's *Schachnovelle* and Vladimir Nabokov's *The Luzhin Defence*, chess becomes the protagonist's central obsession, an addictive passion which sustains the hero in times of ordeal but also consumes his mind and psyche and ultimately leads him to madness.⁴

Other kinds of play have also attracted literary attention. Rabelais piles up an interminable list of over two hundred games which young Gargantua enjoys, as he wastes his childhood in idle pleasure (*Gargantua* 22). In another hilarious episode of this ebullient novel (*Tiers Livre* 39-43) the insipid judge Bridoye judges legal cases by a throw of the dice and almost never fails to pronounce an equitable judgement.⁵ The main story arc of the *Mahābhārata*, the enormous Sanskrit epic, also begins with a fateful game of dice (2.43-67) which determines the destiny of the starring Pandava family, the plot of the

² See SOLEM 1954, 15, 21; LOUGHREY – TAYLOR 1982; POOLE 2004; NETTO 2004, 216-218, 224-226; EQUESTRI 2014; BLOOM 2018, 152-155.

³ See HOLLAND 1959; SCOTT 1965, 266-267; STUBBS 1975, 66-68; BALDO 1987, 365-366, 379-381; TÖRNQVIST 1995, 95-104; KOSKINEN 2005; EFTHYMIADIS 2012, 169-171.

⁴ On Zweig's novella, see DAVIAU – DUNKLE 1973; DOUGLAS 1980; LANDTHALER – LISS 1996; OLTERMANN 2008; GIOVANNINI 2014. On Nabokov's novel, see STRUVE 1967, 161-164; ROGERS 1983, 222-230; CHANCES 1987, 137-139; TOKER 1989, 67-87.

⁵ See PSICHARI 1908; PSICHARI 1909; PERRAT 1954; DERRETT 1963; SCREECH 1964; BAKHTIN 1984, 231-239; DUVAL 1997, 133-154.

epic poem, and ultimately the history of the world (Fig. 1).⁶ In Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata* the rash playboy Alfredo Germont, embittered and frustrated in love, plays a frantic round of cards in a party and wins all the bets.⁷ Life-size playing cards hold sway in the wonderland explored by Lewis Carroll's Alice, a nightmarish country of chaotic and ruleless games.⁸



Figure 1: The game of dice between Śākuni and Yudhiṣṭhira in the *Mahābhārata*. Snapshot from Peter Brook's stage adaptation of the *Mahābhārata* (1985).

The creative interchange between literature and board games may also affect the very structure of the literary work and the organization of the narrative material. The game may be used as a basic narrative framework, a plot pattern or a structural device upon which the entire story rests and unfolds. This happens *par excellence* in modern genre fiction, especially in detective and adventure novels, in which the storyline may be constructed

⁶ See LÜDERS 1907, 7-10, 21-29, 57-60; VAN BUITENEN 1975, 27-30, 106-159; BIARDEAU 1978, 101-108; BROCKINGTON 1998, 16-17, 29-30, 53-54, 139, 187-189; MINKOWSKI 2001, 174-176; WOODS 2001, 31-35, 57; TIEKEN 2004, 5, 39-44; WILMOT 2006, 18, 24-28, 318-497.

⁷ See DELLA SETA 1983, 132-143.

⁸ See EAGLETON 1972; BLAKE 1974, 104-131; BIVONA 1986; SUSINA 2010.

on the blueprint of a board game and its procedure. The successive stages of the game correspond to individual episodes and are joined together to form the plot thread. Thus, the very process of playing, the competition and the moves of the players are transposed to the level of fiction and transcribed in narrative terms. Literary works of this kind are essentially narrative developments (“narrativizations”) of the board game.⁹ Usually the procedure of the game is superimposed on a well-known storytelling pattern or narrative structure, which is firmly established in the literary canon of the corresponding genre and serves as the driving force of the plotline in many other novels. This particular literary pattern is now adapted, so as to fit the rules and phases of the game. The plot device of the table game thus becomes a strategy for the renovation of the standard materials of the storytelling craft.

For example, in Jules Verne’s *The Will of an Eccentric* (1899) an idiosyncratic millionaire devises a gigantesque version of the *jeu de l’oie*, in which the entire territory of the United States serves as the game-board and each one of the federal states corresponds to a square (Fig. 2). Seven players are chosen to participate in this vast contest. As stipulated by the millionaire’s will, they travel from one American state to another, like pawns that move on the squares of the board. Their movements are dictated by the throw of the dice, which are cast at regular intervals by the executor of the will. The winner will be the person who will first reach the final, lucky square, represented by the state of Illinois. The prize is the sum total of the millionaire’s property, sixty million dollars. The *jeu de l’oie* thus functions as the skeleton of the novel. The narrative is taken up by the adventures undergone by the players, as they travel through the country, and the intrigues woven among them, when their paths cross.¹⁰

A time-sanctioned pattern of adventure stories, the treasure hunt, underlies this plot. The characters of J. Verne’s novel are pursuing a treasure, the millionaire’s enormous inheritance. Like the heroes of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* or of Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Gold-Bug* or of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*, they try to reach a final destination which will allow them to obtain this great treasure, the end and prize of their long quest. However, unlike the personages of canonical treasure-hunt narratives, J. Verne’s characters do not follow obscure clues in order to

⁹ Cf. BOYER 1987 on the ludic structure of genre literature.

¹⁰ See HARPOLD 2005, 26-27, 38; HUET 2013, 409-411.

track down the location of the precious hoard on a map or in geographical space. Instead, they move according to the whims of fortune, as dictated by the throw of the dice. The treasure hunt has been amalgamated with the random mechanism of a game of chance.



Figure 2: The life-sized *jeu de l'oie*, as played on the territory of the United States of America. Illustration by G. de Ribaucourt, from Jules Verne, *Le Testament d'un excentrique*, Paris 1899, 160-161.

In Arturo Pérez-Reverte's novel *The Flanders Panel* (1990) the infrastructure is provided by chess, combined this time with a different literary pattern. Julia, an art historian, is restoring a 15th-century Flemish painting which depicts a nobleman and a knight playing chess in a room. A snapshot of the game is shown in the picture, with the white and the black pieces placed in various positions on the chessboard. Julia discovers a hidden inscription at the bottom of the canvas, written in Latin: *Quis necavit equitem?*, "Who killed the knight?" She realizes that she must play this particular *partita* of chess backwards and retrogressively reconstruct the previous moves of the players, so as to solve the mystery of a murder that took place centuries ago. As she attempts this task, a series of murders occur in Julia's own milieu, in such a way as to correspond to the reconstructed moves of the chess game. Every time the black queen eliminates a white pawn, one of Julia's acquaintances dies. It becomes evident that the black queen is the killer's avatar, while the white pawns represent the corresponding victims.

With the help of a local chess master, Julia has to play the *partita* all the way through to the beginning, in order to discover the killer's identity.

Chess is thus interwoven with a favourite plot structure of mystery writing, the detection of serial murders. The successive phases of the chess game run parallel both to the killer's scheme of serial crimes and to the gradual investigation of the case. All the characters involved in the mystery (the detective and her assistant, the murderer, the victims) are represented as pieces on the chessboard. The process of criminal detection merges with the anticipation of the opponent's moves, and as the *partita* of chess unfolds backwards, the investigators approach step by step the discovery of the guilty party.¹¹ In this story the chess grandmaster must combine forces with the detective; Bobby Fischer must dress up like Hercule Poirot, or else the word "checkmate", *māt* in Arabic and Persian, threatens to resume its literal, etymological meaning of "death".

Another famous novel based on chess is Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), the second part of the fairytale saga of Alice's adventures. Little Alice passes through a mirror in her country-house and enters into an alternative world peopled by live, human-sized chess pieces, together with a variety of other wondrous creatures. Alice discovers that the entire countryside of this strange land is divided into squares, like a gigantic chessboard (Fig. 3). If she manages to travel all the way to the eighth row, like a pawn in a regular chess game, she will be transformed into a queen. The main part of the narrative is taken up by Alice's journey across this enormous natural checkerboard. The young girl traverses the squares and passes from one row to the next; in the course of her journey, she encounters the quaint inhabitants of the country and learns their customs and ways of thinking. In the end Alice reaches the eighth row, is crowned queen, and attends an absurd party in her honour. As the party dissolves into utter confusion, Alice wakes up in her armchair and realizes that her adventure was a dream, not unlike life itself.¹²

¹¹ See DE URIOSTE 1997; GARCÍA-CARO 2000, 166-170; DEVENY 2006, 269-271; WALSH 2007, 22, 27-28, 90-93.

¹² See TAYLOR 1952, 94-116; BLAKE 1974, 105, 132-148; LANGE 1993, 96-116; SUSINA 2010, 424-425; DRONG 2011.

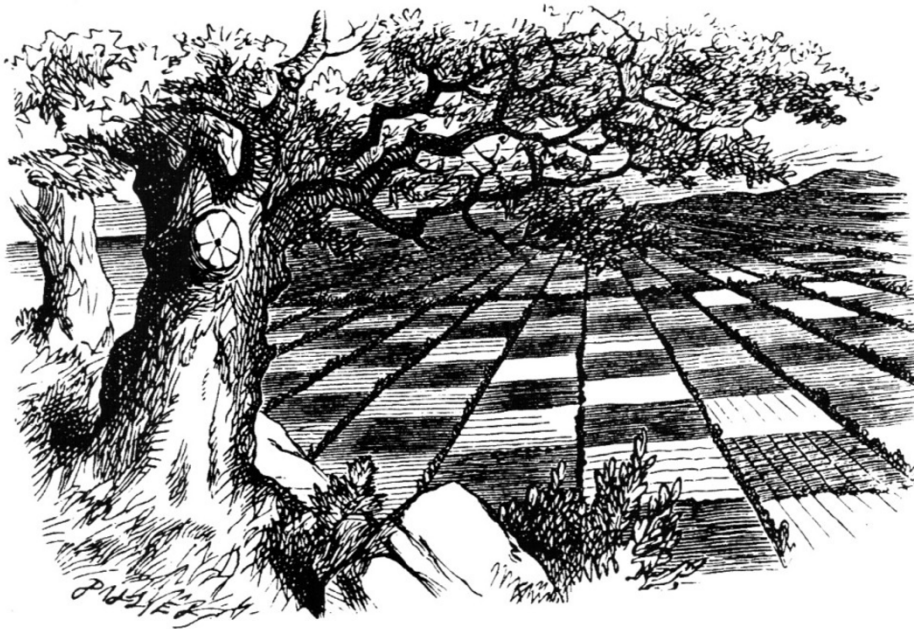


Figure 3: The gigantic chessboard in the land through the looking-glass. Illustration by John Tenniel, from Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*, London 1871, 38.

In this novel the rules of chess are combined with a common narrative pattern of adventure and quest tales, the so-called “initiator structure” (*structure initiatique*), a very old literary construct with deep roots in the popular imaginary and the folk tradition.¹³ The core of the initiatory structure consists in the hero’s voyage into an alternative otherworld, which essentially represents a symbolic descent into the realm of the dead. The hero explores the otherworld and its wonders, faces monsters and threats, encounters figures of great wisdom, and learns important lessons and secrets. In the end the hero returns to the ordinary world and is virtually reborn to a new life. This is also Alice’s experience in the novel, but her initiatory course takes the peculiar form of a chess manoeuvre. Alice’s mystic journey through the wonderland is assimilated to the movement of a pawn

¹³ The best examples of this form in modern literature are Jules Verne’s novels of extraordinary travel and exploration. The same kind of structure has also been traced in Aristophanic comedies, ancient romances such as Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, the novels of Victor Hugo and Georges Sand, Mozart’s *The Magic Flute* etc. See MERKELBACH 1962; TURCAN 1963; CELLIER 1964; VIERNE 1972; VIERNE 1973; THIERCY 1986, 305-327; GARNIER 2004; DÉOM 2005. On the initiatory theme of *Through the Looking-Glass* cf. HENKLE 1982, 95-99.

over the full length of the chessboard and its final transformation into a queen on the eighth square. The structure of initiation blends with the most highly desirable scenario of a chess game.

Card-play has also been used as a surrogate literary structure. In Italo Calvino's *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* (1973) a group of travellers meet in an enchanted castle and discover that they have lost their ability to speak. They can only use a pack of tarot cards, provided by the lord of the castle, so as to narrate the stories of their lives to each other. Every character combines the tarot figures in order to produce a visual narrative of his adventures, which is described by the narrator and must be speculatively interpreted by the reader. The stories turn out to correspond to famous literary compositions or figures of mythology: the myths of Oedipus, Parsifal, and Faust, the dramas of Macbeth, Hamlet, and King Lear, and tales from Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and from the Marquis de Sade. In the second part of the novel the same experience of mute storytelling by means of tarot cards is repeated by the guests of a tavern.

Thus, I. Calvino refurbishes a well-loved medieval genre, the framed collection of stories, of the type of Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.¹⁴ Works of this kind consist of a string of autonomous but interconnected stories, told by a group of characters who are assembled in a communal transitory location, for example a castle, villa, or inn, usually in the course of a journey. In I. Calvino's collection the tales are placed in the same kind of conventional narrative framework; but the telling of the stories is filtered through the playing of tarot cards. The cards themselves become the basic elements of storytelling, the building blocks and the tools of the narrative. They take the characters' place, emblemize the scenery and the incidents, and are combined together to indicate the plotting. Images of the cards are printed in the margins of the pages, in accordance with the corresponding segment of the narrative (Fig. 4). The pack of the tarot cards becomes a machine for constructing stories, a literary mechanism with infinite combinatory possibilities, and provides an

¹⁴ Cf. MARKEY 1999, 22-23, 86-87, 106-107; DE TONI 2007, 173-184; CAVALLARO 2010, 90; BUSL 2012, 796-797.

alternative to language for the creation of narrative meaning.¹⁵ It is as though Chaucer had exchanged his writing desk for a casino table.

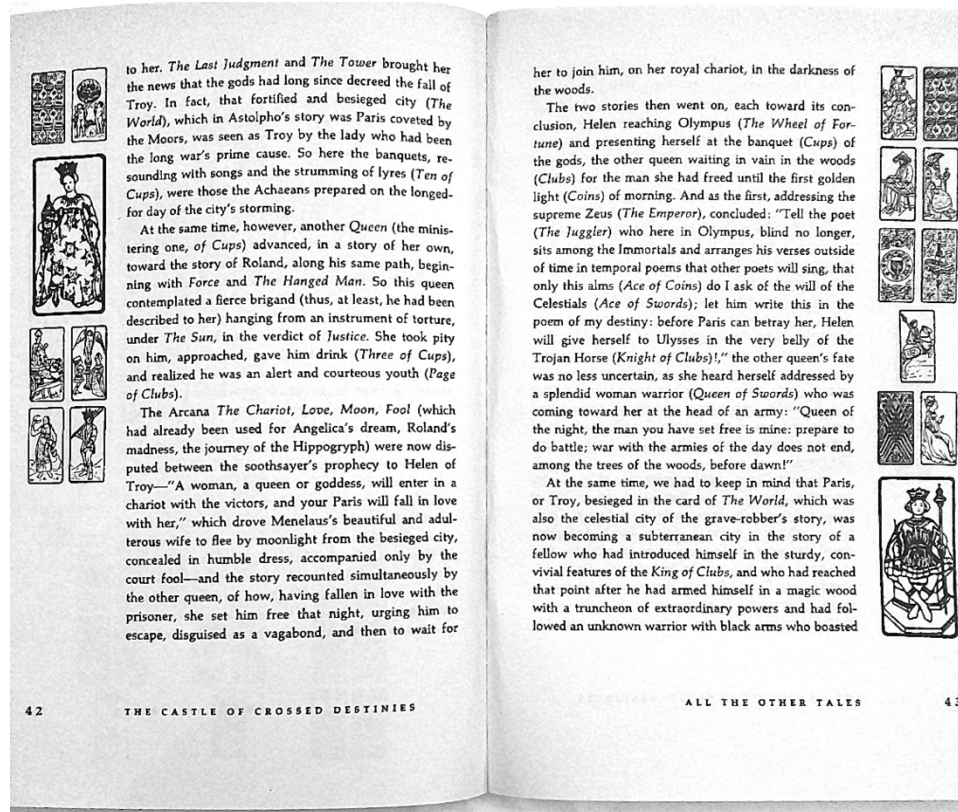


Figure 4: Page with text and images of tarot cards from Italo Calvino, *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*, trans. W. Weaver, London 1976, 42-43.

2. Board games in ancient fiction: From Egypt to Iran over a millennium

Evidently, the ludic structure of the literary narrative – that is, the merge of the process of a table game with a well-known plot pattern or generic technique – has been fruitfully exploited in various forms of writing in 19th- and 20th-century literature. However, this kind of amalgamation and cross-fertilization is not a product of the modern age but can be traced back to

¹⁵ See CANNON 1979; CONTE 1994; CAVALLARO 2010, 90-125; BUSL 2012; and furthermore SCHNEIDER 1980; WOOD 1998, 162-167; MARKEY 1999, 98-107; RICCI 2001, 106-116; RENELLO 2005; PUGLIESE 2008.

ancient times. Its earliest specimens are found in a number of novelistic compositions from the ancient Greek and Near-Eastern world, which range in date from the 1st millennium BC to late antiquity.

2.1. *Playing with the dead in the romance of Setne Khaemwaset*

The first known example is offered by an ancient Egyptian prose narrative work, conventionally called by modern experts *The Tale of Setne Khaemwaset and the Mummies* (also cited, in abbreviated form, as *Setne I*). This is a kind of literary fairytale or imaginary romance which revolves around the adventures of legendary magicians. The text, written in Demotic Egyptian, is preserved on a papyrus of the Ptolemaic age, but the narrative probably goes back to the Saite period (7th and 6th centuries BC), if not to an even earlier time. The protagonist, Setne Khaemwaset, is based on a historical figure, the fourth son of Pharaoh Ramses II (ca. 1279-1213 BC), who was a high priest of Ptah at Memphis and a renowned excavator of old tombs and monuments. Soon after the historical Khaemwaset's death, legends about his hermetic preoccupations and his skills in wizardry started to develop. Gradually an entire cycle of adventurous romances was created, in which Khaemwaset was portrayed as a wizard and a necromancer, always in pursuit of occult gnosis. Many *Realien* of the setting and the storylines of these works point indeed to the historical and cultural conditions of the Saite dynasty.¹⁶

According to the story, the inquisitive Setne is searching for an age-old and powerful book of spells, which was compiled by Thoth himself, the god of scribes and sorcery. As it turns out, the book was acquired in old times by a master magician, prince Nanferkaptah, who literally sacrificed his life to obtain it and was buried with it in his tomb. Setne now breaks into the tomb and confronts Nanferkaptah's mummy, which rises from its bier and speaks like a living man. Here begins the capital episode of the narrative which is

¹⁶ On the cycle of romances about Setne Khaemwaset, its literary materials and chronology, see GRIFFITH 1900, 13-66; PIEPER 1931; PIEPER 1935, 54-60; BRUNNER-TRAUT 1965, 296-301; LICHTHEIM 1980, 125-127; TAIT 1991; GRIMAL 1994; QUACK – RYHOLT 2000; HOFFMANN 2000, 207-213; SIMPSON 2003, 453-454, 470-471, 490-491; QUACK 2005, 30-42; VINSON 2009, 284-285; AGUT-LABORDÈRE – CHAUVEAU 2011, 17-20, 41-42; HOLM 2013, 98-104, 137-147, 157-158; HOFFMANN – QUACK 2018, 10-11, 126-164; VINSON 2018, 5, 22-40.

of interest to the present discussion.¹⁷ Naneferkaptah challenges Setne to play a game against him; the winner of the game will take the book as a prize.

Oddly enough, the kind of the game is never expressly named in the Demotic text, but the occasional descriptive details given about it clearly indicate a board game. As soon as Setne accepts the challenge, it is said that the game-board (*hb^c[.t]*) and the playing pieces¹⁸ were brought before the two opponents. Later on, the board is called “game box” (*h.t n ỉr hb^c.t*); this presumably indicates an oblong, rectangular box-like container, which has a game-board with squares carved on its upper side and incorporates a drawer for storing the pawns in its interior; such contraptions are well known from ancient Egypt, and several nice specimens survive.¹⁹ Many scholars believe that Setne and Naneferkaptah are engaging in a contest of *senet*,²⁰ one of the most celebrated and popular board games throughout the long Egyptian history, from the Old Kingdom to the early Roman period (Fig. 5). Box-like boards and pawns in the form of hounds or dog-headed figures were common ingredients of the *senet*, at least during the New Kingdom, when the tale of Setne is set. Peter Piccione has offered the most cogent and methodical argumentation for this identification.²¹

¹⁷ For text and translation of this episode, see GRIFFITH 1900, 16, 30-32, 116-121; BRUNNER-TRAUT 1965, 171-175, 184-185, 298-299; LICHTHEIM 1980, 127, 132-133; LALOUETTE 1987, 190-191, 197-198; MASPERO 2002, 98-99, 109-110; SIMPSON 2003, 454, 462-463; BRESCIANI 2007, 882-883, 888-889; AGUT-LABORDÈRE – CHAUVEAU 2011, 20, 30-31; HOFFMANN – QUACK 2018, 146, 153-155; VINSON 2018, 7-8, 121-122. For further analysis, cf. PICCIONE 1994, 48-50; SERRANO DELGADO 2011, 96-104; LIOTSAKIS 2012, 150-156.

¹⁸ Literally the “dogs” (*iwiv.w*), a metonymical term that passed into general use because the pawns of various Egyptian board games were often shaped in the form of dogs or dog-headed figures. See PICCIONE 1994, 199; MASPERO 2002, 109-110; CRIST *et alii* 2016, 63, 66-69; VINSON 2018, 156.

¹⁹ See PICCIONE 1980; PICCIONE 1994, 200; DECKER – HERB 1994, 615-616, 663-679; PICCIONE 2007, 54-55; CRIST *et alii* 2016, 52-53.

²⁰ See, e.g., PUSCH 1984, 852; MASPERO 2002, 109-110; TAIT 2007; SERRANO DELGADO 2011, 97-102; LIOTSAKIS 2012, 152-153; CRIST *et alii* 2016, 63, 66. Generally, on the *senet* game, see NEEDLER 1953; PIANKOFF 1974, 117-120; PUSCH 1979; PUSCH 1984; PICCIONE 1980; DECKER 1987, 132-140; DECKER – HERB 1994, 611-616, 642-681; PICCIONE 1994; PICCIONE 2007; CRIST *et alii* 2016, 2-14, 41-80, 170-171.

²¹ PICCIONE 1994. Apart from the material apparatus of the game (box, dog-shaped pawns), Piccione also takes into account the peculiar religious and spiritual aspects of *senet*, which seem to reverberate in important plot elements of the tale. See more details below.



Figure 5: A lion and a gazelle play *senet*. Scene from a painted Egyptian papyrus with images of animals comically engaging in human activities, ca. 1250-1150 BC. British Museum, 10016,1. Reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

It is of course possible that the game played in this narrative is not the *senet*. Perhaps it could be identified with another Egyptian game, such as the so-called “game of twenty squares”. It is also conceivable that the author of the tale did not have a specific kind of game in mind, and the description is only intended to indicate vaguely and generically a board game, without specialized identifying details. Even if one of these possibilities were true, the following analysis would not be essentially affected; regardless of the precise nature of the competitive play, the episode under examination is based in any case on the structure of a board game (even though a generic and nondescript one) and its successive phases, like all the works discussed in the present essay. However, if Setne and his opponent wage indeed a *partita* of *senet*, the plot of the episode gains in terms of narrative irony and artfulness. As will be expounded below, the particular procedure and movements of the *senet* game may be poignantly paralleled with certain aspects of the two opponents’ confrontation or with the adventures and fate of the main hero.²²

²² The absence of the name of *senet* from the text may have a simple explanation: the nature of the board game, as described in the peculiar context of this narrative, would have been more or less evident to the readers, rendering the mention of its name superfluous.

To return to the storyline: as soon as the board and the pawns are brought before them, the two magicians start playing.²³ Naneferkaptah wins the first round. Immediately he recites a spell, gives a blow to Setne's head with the box-like game-board, and Setne sinks into the ground up to his feet. Then the two men resume playing. Naneferkaptah also wins the second phase of the game and follows the same magical procedure, with the recitation of the spell and the blow on his adversary's head; now Setne sinks up to his penis. The same thing is repeated for a third time, and Setne sinks up to his ears. At this point Setne realizes that he is in serious danger. He summons his brother Inaros, who has accompanied him into the tomb, and asks for help. Inaros ascends quickly to the surface and brings back into the tomb the powerful amulets of the god Ptah, together with Setne's books of sorcery. As soon as these amulets are placed on Setne's body, the latter is released from the trap and springs upwards. Then, with readiness of mind, Setne grabs the book and runs out of the tomb, thus escaping the mummy's magical influence. This is not the end of the story, of course. The dead Naneferkaptah exercises his supernatural powers and conjures up a ghostly apparition to intimidate Setne. In the end, the hero is forced to return the accursed book to its owner's grave.

In this central episode of the narrative the confrontation of the two expert wizards takes the form of a board game, most probably a series of rounds of *senet*. However, another story-pattern lurks in the background: the contest of magic between sorcerers, a fairytale theme widespread in the entire Near East from very ancient times.²⁴ Already in a Sumerian epic poem of the late third millennium BC, *Enmerkar and Ensuhrigirana*, we read of a confrontation between a foreign wizard, who uses black magic to harm the Sumerian city of Unug, and a beneficent old witch who counters his

Alternatively, the author, who was composing a tale of suspense and mystery, may have wished to maintain an atmosphere of ambiguity and puzzlement with regard to various details of the action, so as to make readers wonder and rack their minds for explanations. Under this perspective, the purposeful anonymity of the game would induce readers to make guesses about its identity on the basis of the clues offered by the narrative. All this would enhance the suspense and enthrallment of the story.

²³ A tale of Herodotus (2.112) about Pharaoh Rhampsinitus presents the same essential story-pattern as Setne's adventure: the Pharaoh descends alive to the netherworld, plays a board game with "Demeter" (i.e., Isis), and returns carrying a golden kerchief as a prize. The two narratives may be connected and stem from related cycles of legends. See in detail SERRANO DELGADO 2011, 96-104; LIOTSAKIS 2012, 150-156.

²⁴ Cf. TAIT 2007, 50.

spells and protects the city.²⁵ Afterwards the theme became common in the fictional literature of ancient Egypt, especially during the Late Period. In the known Egyptian tales of this type the contest also takes place between an evil foreign sorcerer and a wise Egyptian court priest. For example, another romance of the cycle of Setne contains two magical competitions, one of them artfully emboxed inside the other. The gifted child magician Si-Osire competes against a shaman who has come from Nubia to put Egypt to shame. Their contest turns out to be a sequel and a reflection of an earlier magical duel, which had taken place many centuries before; on that occasion another enemy sorcerer from Nubia was matched by the wise Egyptian priest Horus of Paneshy, the Pharaoh's counsellor and protector.²⁶

Another Demotic tale describes a contest of wizardry between the legendary vizier Imhotep and an Assyrian witch. The contest is waged in connection with a military campaign of Pharaoh Djoser against the Assyrians and takes place on the battlefield, at the side of the battling armies.²⁷ The competition in miracles between Moses and the Pharaoh's magicians in the Biblical book of *Exodus* (7-9) is based on the same pattern and may have been influenced from tales of sorcery contests.²⁸ It is noteworthy that in all these narratives the competing magicians act as representatives of their kings or peoples and face the champion of an enemy kingdom. The *agon* of magic is the fictional equivalent of an interstate war. Behind the clash of spells, supernatural formulas, and magical feats we detect the political struggles between sovereign powers or enemy populations of the ancient Near East.²⁹

²⁵ See BERLIN 1979, 54-59, 88-89; VANSTIPHOUT 2003, 42-45; BLACK *et alii* 2004, 4-11; KONSTANTAKOS 2008, 74-77; WILCKE 2012, 26-27, 57-74, 80-86; KONSTANTAKOS 2016, 209-210.

²⁶ See GRIFFITH 1900, 51-66, 162-207; BRUNNER-TRAUT 1965, 198-214, 301; LICHTHEIM 1980, 142-151; LALOUE 1987, 211-224; MASPERO 2002, 125-137; SIMPSON 2003, 476-489; BRESCIANI 2007, 901-908; AGUT-LABORDÈRE – CHAUVEAU 2011, 49-65; HOLM 2013, 141-144, 157-158; HOFFMANN – QUACK 2018, 132-145.

²⁷ See RYHOLT 2009; HOLM 2013, 164-166.

²⁸ See GUNKEL 1987, 111-121; NOEGEL 1996; RÖMER 2003; FELDT 2012, 20-42, 77-178; HOLM 2013, 119, 144, 378; KONSTANTAKOS 2016, 207-213.

²⁹ Cf. KONSTANTAKOS 2008, 126-141. The contest of wizards is also widespread in the folktale tradition worldwide. See, e.g., COSQUIN 1922, 501-612; SCHERF 1995, 110-113, 748-751, 868-871, 1096-1098, 1436-1441; CLOUSTON 2002, 210-224, 255-257; KONSTANTAKOS 2016 with further references.

In the confrontation of Setne and Naneferkaptah this age-old popular story-pattern is merged with the playing of the board game. As emerges from the narrative, the rounds of the game are intrinsically connected with the implementation of magical spells. Whenever a round is completed, the winner has the opportunity to cast a damaging spell against his opponent. In the other stories of magical contests each one of the competitors employs spells to create magical entities (divine images, golems, monsters, wild animals, or destructive physical elements) in order to harm his enemy or neutralize the enemy's creations. In the duel of *Setne I*, on the other hand, the spells seem to grow out of the board game itself.

Although the narrational style at this point of the Demotic text is paratactic and somewhat brusque, the instant, almost "rapid-fire" succession of the events should leave no doubt about their inherent connection to the readers' minds. Naneferkaptah wins a round of the game; immediately after his victory, he recites a magical spell against Setne; and immediately after the spell, he hits Setne's head with the game box, and the hero is immersed into the earth to a wondrously great depth, far more than he would have been normally expected to suffer because of a simple bump on his head. Clearly, it is not the mere force of the strike that sinks Setne so deeply into the ground. The blow with the game box is only a physical complement of the magical spell; a material object is actively manipulated in a certain way so as to channel the marvellous spiritual force onto the victim's person and produce the intended miraculous effect. It is the recited spell that releases the supernatural power required for the extraordinary immersion of Setne's body. In a way, the game box is used like the magic wand of medieval and modern western tales of fantasy, transmitting the power of the wizard's spell to the target.³⁰ And since Naneferkaptah implements his spell only after winning a round of the game, the very logic of the narration implies that his victory is a prerequisite for the use of this particular spell. Otherwise, the mummified sorcerer might well have employed his magical formulas from the beginning, as soon as he perceived Setne breaking into his tomb; he would have thus directly disposed of the

³⁰ A possible parallel may be found in the wizardry contest of the Sumerian epic *Enmerkar and Ensuhrigirana*: the two opponents magically create various animals by throwing a certain item into the river. According to one interpretation (BERLIN 1979, 54-57, 88-89), this item is a copper object with extraordinary powers which functions like a magic wand. On the use of wands in ancient Egyptian magical practice, see RITNER 1993, 19, 227.

intruder, and no game would have been necessary. If the board game is called for and played, it must have a function within Naneferkaptah's magical strategy of defence against his opponent. As suggested by the narrative sequence, the game serves exactly in order to empower the winner of every round to cast a countering spell against his adversary. The victory in each phase of the game generates a magical force, which is appropriately channelled by the winner, so as to strike and hurt the loser.³¹

At this juncture, the reader may appreciate the aptness of the *senet* game for this particular narrative context, its suitability for the mechanics and effects of the two wizards' magical confrontation. P. Piccione has emphasized the religious and eschatological aspects of *senet*, which tally with the mortuary setting of the episode. The *senet* was understood as a means of communication between the living and the dead: in Egyptian monuments and ritual texts a deceased person was often portrayed playing *senet* with a living one inside the tomb; thus, the game could be perceived as an attempt to establish a connection with the otherworld. This is also its function in the tale of Setne: the living hero is challenged to play and win the board game, which takes place once again inside a tomb and against a deceased man, in order to come to terms with the dead sorcerer and gain access to his possessions (the magical book). The playing of the *senet* was also regarded as symbolical of the passage of the soul through the netherworld, with the purpose of achieving spiritual renewal and a new life. This corresponds, in a sense, to Setne's experiences in the plot. The hero stakes his very existence in the game and hopes to acquire through it a divine book that contains the ultimate secrets of life,³² even though his quest is motivated by a selfish desire for personal gratification.

These parallels link the spiritual dimension of the *senet* to the scenery and the general outline of the episode. In addition, the playing procedure of *senet* in itself, the movements of the pieces and the course of the game, present characteristic analogies with the unfolding of the action in the course of

³¹ This was already understood by MASPERO 2002, 110.

³² On all this see the detailed analysis of PICCIONE 1994. I cannot dwell more on his learned and valuable interpretation, because the focus of my discussion is different: rather than the mystical dimensions of the game, I am interested in the playing process itself as a narrative device for structuring the storyline and moving the plot forward. On these religious and spiritual sides of the *senet*, cf. also NEEDLER 1953, 68-70; PIANKOFF 1974, 117-120; PICCIONE 1980; PUSCH 1984, 851-852; PICCIONE 2007; SERRANO DELGADO 2011, 98-102; LIOTSAKIS 2012, 152-153; CRIST *et alii* 2016, 2-3, 41, 47-58, 170-171.

Setne's tomb-raiding adventure. As the two wizards play against each other, the loser of the *partita* suffers magically on his own body the same fate that might befall an endangered pawn of the game. The *senet* draughtsman, while it was being moved on the board, faced a number of risks: it could land on a pitfall square and be detained there; or it might be overtaken and attacked by one of the opponent's pieces, and thus be obstructed, blocked, or removed from the board; or it might be relegated to a losing square and be eliminated.³³ Setne is also confronted with the equivalents of these eventualities in actual circumstances: he falls into a pitfall, as his adversary makes him sink into the ground, and is blocked and immobilized like an obstructed pawn. He is also threatened with total removal from the world of the living, similarly to a piece that risks elimination. If Naneferkaptah had managed to play and win a fourth round of *senet*, Setne would have been entirely buried into the ground, under the tomb, and would have disappeared into the netherworld – like a pawn hidden away in the pitch-dark interior of the game box.

Thus, the entire story of Setne and Naneferkaptah is based on an amalgamation of the board game with the narrative theme of the magical contest. In this way, this latter theme assumes a new variant form. The broader political aspect of the contest, which standardly underlies all its other known fictional treatments (both in ancient Egypt and generally in the Near East), is lost in *Setne I*. Setne and Naneferkaptah are not the champions of rival kingdoms fighting for martial victory and sovereignty. Their competition in sorcery is not a supernatural version of war, civic rebellion, or political struggle. It is only a game of skill and cleverness, like the *senet*, played by two private contestants who are keen on personal gain. This aspect has reverberations on the general meaning of the story. Both Setne himself and his remote ancestor Naneferkaptah are flawed wizards. Magic is simply a game for them, a means for entertainment and acquisition of precious prizes, not a power for serving the realm, protecting their king and people, or promoting the common benefit. They handle their spells and sorcery tools with the nonchalance of the amateur players of a table game;

³³ On the movements and risks of the draughtsmen in the *senet* game, see NEEDLER 1953, 66-71; PIANKOFF 1974, 117-120; PICCIONE 1980, 56-58; PUSCH 1984, 852-855; DECKER 1987, 133, 137-138; PICCIONE 2007, 54-56; cf. CRIST *et alii* 2016, 54-56, 64-67, 98-99.

and ultimately their irresponsible practice of magic leads both of them to personal suffering or doom.³⁴

2.2. *The suitors' game in Apion of Alexandria*

Similar amalgamation of ludic and narrative patterns also occurs in ancient Greek stories. A prominent example is provided by Apion, an Alexandrian grammarian and scholar active in the times of the emperors Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius. Among other works of antiquarian and philological character, Apion produced an interpretative dictionary of the Homeric poems under the title *Γλῶσσαι Ὀμηρικαί* (*Homeric Glosses*).³⁵ As the surviving fragments indicate, Apion explained many difficult words and idiomatic expressions of the epics and provided grammatical data, fanciful etymological hypotheses, and miscellaneous cultural, geographical, and natural-historical information in order to elucidate his lemmata.

Nevertheless, Apion did not limit himself to semantic and philological exegesis. In some cases, he seems to have included genuinely narrative portions in his explanatory comments, relating small tales on the adventures of Homer himself or of his heroes, which essentially belong to the type of novelistic fiction.³⁶ This is the case with the fragment *FGrH* 616 F36,³⁷ in which Apion comments on a well-known verse from the *Odyssey*.³⁸ According to the Homeric passage, the suitors of Penelope played a game

³⁴ Cf. LALOUETTE 1987, 204; PICCIONE 1994, 200; SIMPSON 2003, 453-454; HOLM 2013, 139-141; HOFFMANN – QUACK 2018, 146; VINSON 2018, 3, 198-203, 224-225, 271-272.

³⁵ Concerning Apion and his grammatical work on Homer, see BAUMERT 1886; COHN 1894; LUDWICH 1917; LUDWICH 1918; NEITZEL 1977; HASLAM 1994, 1-3, 21-23, 26-29, 35-43; VAN DER HORST 2002, 207-222; DILLERY 2003; DAMON 2008, 338-347; MATTHAIOS 2015, 221-223, 278; KEYSER 2015, 64-75.

³⁶ See, e.g., *FGrH* 616 F34 (after Homer completed his two epics, he added at the beginning a codified indication of the number of their books); F35a (Homer was an astronomer); cf. F15 (Apion summoned Homer's ghost to interrogate him about his homeland and family). See COHN 1894; VAN DER HORST 2002, 209-210; DILLERY 2003, 386-387; KEYSER 2015, 51-52, 64-66, 79. In his historical work, the *Aegyptiaca*, Apion also related the famous folktale of "Androcles and the lion" (*FGrH* 616 F5) and other romantic legends and tales of magic (F6, F23, F28). See MARX 1889, 55-67; BRODEUR 1922; BRODEUR 1924; SCOBIE 1977, 18-23; KEYSER 2015, 13, 40-44, 51-52, 57-58, 60-61; HANSEN 2017, 189-191, 444. He clearly had a penchant for exciting fictional stories; cf. DICKIE 2001, 205-208; VAN DER HORST 2002, 209-214; DAMON 2008, 348-355; DAMON 2011, 134-145; KEYSER 2015, 79-80.

³⁷ From *Ath.*, *Deipn.*, 16f-17b.

³⁸ *Od.*, 1.106-107.

of *pessoi* in the courtyard of Odysseus' palace, while they were feasting and enjoying themselves.³⁹ Apion provides a detailed description of the rules and the procedure of the suitors' game. If this digression was indeed included in the *Homeric Glosses*, it might have been forwarded as part of the elucidation of the word *pessoi*.⁴⁰

As Apion explains, the suitors numbered one hundred and eight. Their playing pieces, small tokens or marbles (ψήφοι), were divided into two equal groups of fifty-four each and placed on opposing sides; a small void space was left in-between. In this middle space a single piece was positioned, which was called "Penelope". This was set up as the mark to be thrown at. The players cast lots to determine the order in which they would play. The first one took aim and tried to hit the "Penelope" piece with his marble. If he succeeded in pushing the "Penelope" forward, he moved his marble to the position occupied by the "Penelope" before the hit. Then the successful player would try to strike the "Penelope" again with his own piece from this second position. The purpose of the game was to hit the "Penelope" as many times as possible without touching the marble of any other player. The suitor who scored high points in this game had good hopes of marrying the real Penelope in the end. The game was therefore a test for determining which man would eventually wed the Ithacan queen.

Apion claimed to have heard all this information from a native of Ithaca called Cteson. No such person is attested anywhere else in ancient sources; apparently, Cteson is an invented character, a creation of Apion's imagination.⁴¹ He was perhaps supposed to have been a descendant of Odysseus' subjects or even a contemporary of the suitors themselves. The counterfeit attribution, an example of the classic literary technique of pseudepigraphy, clearly designates Apion's account as fiction. The entire text is a short novella, a kind of paratextual narrative gloss on the *Odyssey*. A coup of fictional storytelling is here cast in the form of a philological and

³⁹ On this Homeric game, cf. BECQ DE FOUQUIÈRES 1869, 308-309, 386-388; LASER 1987, 123-127; KURKE 1999, 253-255; CARBONE 2005, 161.

⁴⁰ The fragment has been plausibly allocated to the *Homeric Glosses* by JACOBY 1958, 141-142 and KEYSER 2015, 4, 64-67, 79. BAUMERT 1886, 6-7, 50 assigned it to a lost commentary (*hypomnemata*) on the Homeric poems; but it is doubtful whether Apion wrote such a commentary (COHN 1894, 2806; HASLAM 1994, 26).

⁴¹ Cf. DAMON 2008, 353-355; DAMON 2011, 139. BRODEUR 1922 similarly proposed that Apion invented the story of Androcles and the lion, which he presents as an event he has personally witnessed.

lexicographical note on a great poetic text. Apion's narrative digression is a rudimentary forerunner of the postmodern literary artifices which would be later developed by authors such as Jorge Luis Borges, Vladimir Nabokov, Milorad Pavić, and Tom Stoppard.

The core of Apion's tale is an elaborate play with marbles, which requires skill and good marksmanship together with a modicum of luck. Significantly, all the elements of this game – the rules and procedure, the division of the game-board, the number and movements of the pieces – are unique and unparalleled in other ancient sources. Apion's description does not accord with the types of the *petteia* game that are known from Classical authors.⁴² Presumably the form of the game has been invented *ad hoc* by Apion himself. The Alexandrian scholar borrowed the name of the *pessoi* from the *Odyssey* and attributed it to an imaginary game of his own creation. The suitors' playful amusement is as fictitious as the rest of the story – another indication of the novelistic nature of Apion's narrative.

As for the prize, it is nothing less than Penelope's hand – in other words, the suitors' main preoccupation and objective in the Homeric epic. The suitors' play is a competition for determining who will become the consort of the queen. The very process of the wooing is symbolically transferred on the game-board; a central pawn stands for Penelope herself, while her suitors are represented by the other tokens which try to strike and move the queen's piece (that is, metaphorically, to depose Penelope from her sovereign position and appropriate her royal power).⁴³ Thus, the suitors' game practically epitomizes and condenses the central theme of the second half of the *Odyssey*. The purpose of the game indicates the poetic prototype which underlies Apion's fictional conception. The playing of the *pessoi* is modelled after the famous contest of the bow, which Penelope proposes to her suitors as an ordeal for selecting her new husband.⁴⁴ As postulated by Penelope,⁴⁵ the man who will draw the string of the mighty bow with the greatest ease and will successfully shoot his arrow through the holes of twelve axes, will gain the queen's hand as a prize.

⁴² See BECQ DE FOUQUIÈRES 1869, 405-407; LAMER 1927, 1970; GUÉNIOT 2000, 38-39.

⁴³ Cf. PURCELL 1995, 7; KURKE 1999, 254-255; CARBONE 2005, 162-163.

⁴⁴ *Od.*, 21. Cf. KURKE 1999, 254-255.

⁴⁵ *Od.*, 21.74-77.

In Apion's story this archetypical mythical *agon* is playfully rewritten in terms of gamesmanship. Like the epic bow contest, the game of marbles serves as a test to choose the winning suitor. However, the difference between the two narratives is telling. The apparatus used in the original Homeric episode, Odysseus' valiant bow, is a lethal weapon. In the end of the contest Odysseus himself, who is present in the palace courtyard in disguise, will take the bow in hand and shoot the suitors to death. In Apion's playful fiction this instrument of heroic slaughter is replaced by the innocuous accessories of a diverting communal sport. Instead of bloody arrows which inflict mortal wounds, the suitors use quaint little marbles which are dexterously pushed around and thrown at a toy target. Athenaeus, who preserves Apion's passage, seems also to have perceived that the suitors' game is a kind of soft and effete equivalent or substitute of the traditional bow contest prescribed by the Odyssean epic myth. As Athenaeus comments by way of conclusion, after citing Apion's text, "in this way the suitors, because of their luxury, have so flabby arms that they are not even able to stretch the bow".⁴⁶ A lifetime of gaming proves to be totally inadequate for the breeding of mythical heroes.

Thus, at the hands of the Hellenistic scholar-storyteller, the Archaic epic of honour and bravery becomes a courtly novella about dilettantish social amusements. Odysseus' original bow contest had turned the dining hall of the Ithacan megaron into a battlefield; by contrast, Apion's tale transforms it into a playground for bantering gallants. For the epic Odysseus love was a fight; for Apion's suitors it is just a game.⁴⁷

2.3. Chess and backgammon in an Iranian tale

A third example comes from the novelistic literature of Sasanian Iran. The short narrative pamphlet called *Wīzārīšn ī čatrang ud nihišn ī nēw-Ardaxšīr* ("The explanation of chess and the invention of backgammon", also known under the abbreviated title *Čatrang-nāmag*, "The book of chess") was composed in the Pahlavi language, probably around the 7th century AD.⁴⁸ The material of the narrative clearly goes back to the Sasanian period and

⁴⁶ Ath., *Deipn.*, 17b: οὕτω δὲ διὰ τὴν τρυφὴν τὰς χεῖρας οἱ μνηστῆρες ἔχουσιν ἀπαλὰς ὥς μηδὲ τὸ τόξον ἐντείνειν δύνασθαι.

⁴⁷ Cf. KURKE 1999, 254-255; CARBONE 2005, 161-163.

⁴⁸ On the dating of the extant text, see NÖLDEKE 1892, 26; CHRISTENSEN 1930, 108-110; PAGLIARO 1951, 100; PANAINO 1999, 83-91; MARK 2007, 141-142.

may have been formed already during the reign of King Khusrau I (531-579 AD), in which the plot is set. The story depicts well the cultural and intellectual milieu of Khusrau's court, with its thriving scientific interests and philosophical speculations. Perhaps the tale circulated at that time in oral tradition as a court legend. A written version, a forerunner of the extant text, may also have been redacted in the Sasanian era and included in one of the great historical or didactic compilations which were produced during Khusrau's golden age.⁴⁹ Later the story was incorporated in the vast Persian heroic epic, the *Shāhnāme* by Firdausi, the paramount poetic treatment of Iranian myths and legends. Firdausi narrates the tale with greater literary skill and changes many circumstantial details, especially concerning the description of the games and their parts and rules. Nevertheless, the main narrative pattern is retained in the *Shāhnāme*, basically unchanged.⁵⁰

This brief tale fictionalizes the invention of chess and backgammon in the context of an intellectual *agon* between two rival monarchs: the historical Persian king Khusrau I and Dēwīšarm, a legendary ruler of India. Dēwīšarm wishes to test the intelligence and wisdom of the Iranians. He therefore sends to Khusrau the board and pieces of chess, which has supposedly just been invented by the Indian sages, and proposes them as a puzzle for solution. The wise men of Iran are challenged to guess the rules and the rationale of this new game. If they succeed, Khusrau will receive lavish gifts and tribute from the Indians. Otherwise, the Persians will have to pay taxes to the Indian kingdom. No one of the Persian sages can solve the puzzle apart from Wuzurgmihr, Khusrau's clever minister. He easily explains the logic of chess and the symbolisms of the pawns before the Indian envoys, and then plays and wins three rounds against their leader. After this victory, it is Wuzurgmihr's turn to set a problem to the Indians. He designs another new game, the backgammon, and names it *nēw-Ardaxšīr* ("noble is Ardaxšīr"), in honour of the great founder of the Sasanian Empire. Khusrau equips Wuzurgmihr with a magnificent retinue, and the wise Persian minister travels to India and proposes his game to King

⁴⁹ See BRUNNER 1978, 43; PANAINO 1999, 48-58, 86-91, 97-99, 119, 132-133; DARYAEE 2002, 283, 286-288; MARK 2007, 142-143; cf. CHRISTENSEN 1930, 100; PAGLIARO 1951, 98-100.

⁵⁰ See MOHL 1877, 306-319; PIZZI 1888, 222-237; WARNER – WARNER 1915, 380-394; DAVIS 2006, 698-704. Cf. NÖLDEKE 1892, 22-25; MURRAY 1913, 150, 155-157; PANAINO 1999, 86, 125-133; SCHÄDLER 2002, 99-102; KONSTANTAKOS 2008, 98-100; DARYAEE 2010, 11-16.

Dēwīšarm as a brain-teaser. For forty days the Indian sages try to understand the rationale of backgammon, but to no avail. Thus, Wuzurgmihr collects again much tribute from the Indian ruler and returns triumphant to Iran (Fig. 6).⁵¹



Figure 6: The wise Wuzurgmihr and the sages of India play backgammon and chess. Miniature on paper, from an illustrated manuscript of the *Anthology of Persian Treatises*, Herat, Iran, Timurid period, 1427. Berenson Collection, I Tatti, Florence. Reproduced by permission of the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Photo Donato Pineider, Firenze.

This storyline belongs to a well-known international tale type, the riddle contest of kings, which was widespread in the Near East from very ancient times and became especially common in court legends and wisdom

⁵¹ For translations, discussion, and commentary on this Sasanian work, see PAGLIARO 1951; NYBERG 1964, xxi-xxii, 120-122, 206; BRUNNER 1978; DARYAEE 2002, 298-312; PANAINO 1999; DARYAEE 2010.

literature. The standard pattern of the narrative type features two rival kings who engage in a form of spiritual competition instead of waging war against one another. Each one of the kings proposes difficult riddles or intellectual puzzles for solution to the other. The losing monarch is obliged to become the winner's vassal and pay him tribute or cede portions of his territory, as though he had lost a war. In most of the stories the rulers are helped by their wise counsellors, who invent or solve the riddles on behalf of their kings. This tale type is first traced in a Sumerian epic of the late 3rd millennium BC and then in Egyptian legends and novelistic writings, from the 2nd millennium BC onwards. With the passage of time, it gained broader international diffusion over the entire Near East. It was incorporated in the enormously popular *Book of Ahiqar*, an Aramaic didactic romance which was translated in many languages; it was also taken over in ancient Jewish legends about the wise King Solomon and in Greek novellas of the Hellenistic and Imperial period. By the last centuries of antiquity, the riddle contest of kings had infiltrated into the legendarium of Iran and the novelistic traditions of India and the Arab world.⁵²

The same pattern provides the framework of the Persian tale of Wuzurgmihr.⁵³ In the legendary tradition of Iran Wuzurgmihr became the model of the sage, the prototype of the wise courtier and royal counsellor, and many collections of sayings were attributed to him. Thus, he was included in several legends of wisdom contests, in which he played the role of the Persian king's adviser. In such stories Wuzurgmihr confronted the enemies of Iran (e.g., the envoys of the Indian ruler or of the Byzantine emperor) in a spiritual competition, solved their difficult puzzles for the sake of his king, and demonstrated the intellectual superiority of the Persians. The narrative scheme of the riddle contest was thus transplanted and applied to the main figure of Middle Persian wisdom literature.⁵⁴

⁵² On the diffusion and varieties of this story-pattern, see the detailed studies of KONSTANTAKOS 2004 and KONSTANTAKOS 2008, 65-183 with further bibliography. See also BENFEY 1892, 163-205; KRAPPE 1941; GOLDBERG 1993, 25-41, 157-172; KONSTANTAKOS 2019, 316-334.

⁵³ Cf. NÖLDEKE 1892, 25; MURRAY 1913, 153; CHRISTENSEN 1930, 102-104, 108-111; BRUNNER 1978, 44; PERRY 1986, 163-165; DE BLOIS 1990, 20; PANAINO 1999, 47-48, 98-99, 111, 119; KONSTANTAKOS 2008, 98-100.

⁵⁴ On the cycle of legends and wisdom compositions developed around Wuzurgmihr's figure, see CHRISTENSEN 1930; BRUNNER 1978, 46-48; GRIGNASCHI 1978; PERRY 1986, 163-165; MOTLAGH 1990; DE BLOIS 1990, 48-50, 53-57; MARCOTTE 1998; PANAINO 1999, 83-87, 105-123, 132-133.

In the Sasanian tale the opponents do not exchange traditional riddles or kindred mental exercises, as happens in the canonical stories of this type. Instead, they propound to one another newly-devised board games, which are based on secret rules and have a sufficiently puzzling appearance. These games function as difficult enigmas for solution. Their complicated rules and procedures correspond to the linguistic intricacies and the tortuous imagery of the verbal conundrums, such as are usually set in the tales of riddle contests. The two games of the Iranian narrative are also equipped with a symbolic dimension, a second level of meaning. Their apparatus, pieces, movements, and manner of playing are said to refer to a specific order of things in the cosmos or in human experience; chess represents the armies and strategies of war, while backgammon embodies the entire structure of the heavenly and the earthly universe (see below on these symbolisms). In this respect, the two games resemble proper riddles; riddles similarly have a hidden “second sense”, in so far as their linguistic texture of metaphors and paradoxes alludes to a distinct reality.⁵⁵ In the Persian story the competitors are called to guess the secret symbolism of the games proposed, just like solvers of riddles, who must decipher the meaning cryptically conveyed by the obscure and enigmatic words and phrases of the riddling text. Once again, the board games are introduced into a preexistent narrative structure and contribute to the production of an innovative literary amalgam.

This time, however, unlike what happened in the Egyptian romance of Setne and in Apion’s novella, the games are not indicators of frivolity; they do not signal the characters’ irresponsible attitude or unheroic flippancy. In the Sasanian tale chess and backgammon operate as instruments in a novelized but grave interstate conflict, which will determine the fate and suzerainty of entire realms, exactly as happens in the canonical narratives about royal riddle contests. Furthermore, the games themselves are presented as serious and meaningful pursuits, which reflect important realities of the human world. Chess, as interpreted by Wuzurgmihr, is an allegory of war and symbolizes the clash of armies on the battlefield. Backgammon is given an even more sublime, cosmic significance and reflects the substance and structure of the universe. As Wuzurgmihr explains, the game-board is the image of the entire earth. The thirty

⁵⁵ See KONSTANTAKOS 2019, 307-308 with many references and bibliography.

counters, half of them black and half white, represent time, the alternation of luminous days and dark nights. The casting of the die stands for the revolution of the constellations and the firmament, which determines the operation of fate. As for the numbers on the die, they correspond to the numerical analogies inherent in the spiritual and material universe, from the one and only god to the six seasons of the year. The entire game is a parable for the creation of the cosmos by the divinity. Thus, the exegesis of the game becomes an epitome of Iranian cosmological and religious thought.⁵⁶

Formed at the twilight of the ancient world, this peculiar Iranian tale offers perhaps the most elevated and spiritual presentation of board games in ancient fiction.

Epilogue

Both the modern genre novels surveyed in section 1 and the ancient narrative works discussed in section 2 share a fundamental common characteristic. In all cases a board game provides the structural backbone for the development of the story and for the main dramatic conflict between the characters. The heroes confront each other over the game-board, pursue their plans through the rounds of their game, and express their passions and emotions by means of their moves. Above all, in every one of these tales the game functions as a literary catalyst which helps to recast old and traditional, perhaps even overused narrative models into a new creative form. In this respect, the fiction of game-playing becomes a symbol of the transformative and innovative power of literary narrative itself. After all, the writing of literature – is it not the most complex and elaborate game that can be played on a table?

⁵⁶ On these symbolisms and their function in the narrative, see the analysis of PANAINO 1999, 48-58, 86-87, 159-161, 204-223; see also PAGLIARO 1940; PAGLIARO 1951, 98, 104-108; BRUNNER 1978, 45-48; PANAINO 1998, 20, 85-86; DARYAEE 2002, 287-295; MARK 2007, 143, 152; DARYAEE 2010, 9-11; O'SULLIVAN 2012, 202-204.

Bibliography

- Agut-Labordère D. – Chauveau M. 2011. *Héros, magiciens et sages oubliés de l'Égypte ancienne. Une anthologie de la littérature en égyptien démotique*, Paris.
- Bakhtin M.M. 1984. *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H. Iswolsky, Bloomington.
- Baldo J. 1987. "Narrative foiled in Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*", *Theatre Journal* 39, 364-382.
- Baumert H. 1886. *Apionis quae ad Homerum pertinent fragmenta*, Königsberg.
- Becq de Fouquières L. 1869. *Les jeux des anciens. Leur description, leur origine, leurs rapports avec la religion, l'histoire, les arts et les mœurs*, Paris.
- Benfey T. 1892. *Kleinere Schriften*, A. Bezzenberger (ed.), vol. II, Berlin.
- Berlin A. 1979. *Enmerkar and Ensuĝkešdanna. A Sumerian Narrative Poem*, Philadelphia.
- Biardeau M. 1978. "Études de mythologie hindoue (V)", *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 65, 87-238.
- Bivona D. 1986. "Alice the child-imperialist and the games of wonderland", *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 41, 143-171.
- Black J. – Cunningham G. – Robson E. – Zólyomi G. 2004. *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, Oxford.
- Blake K. 1974. *Play, Games, and Sport. The Literary Works of Lewis Carroll*, Ithaca – London.
- Bloom G. 2018. *Gaming the Stage. Playable Media and the Rise of English Commercial Theater*, Ann Arbor.
- Boyer A.-M. 1987. " 'Monsieur Poirot, qu'attendez-vous pour abattre vos cartes ?' Les fondements ludiques de la paralittérature", *Littérature* 68, 3-25.

- Bresciani E. 2007. *Letteratura e poesia dell'antico Egitto. Cultura e società attraverso i testi*, Torino.
- Brockington J. 1998. *The Sanskrit Epics*, Leiden.
- Brodeur A.G. 1922. "Androcles and the lion", *Modern Philology* 11, 195-214.
- Brodeur A.G. 1924. "The grateful lion. A study in the development of mediaeval narrative", *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 39, 485-524.
- Brunner C.J. 1978. "The Middle Persian explanation of chess and invention of backgammon", *JANES* 10, 43-51.
- Brunner-Traut E. 1965. *Altägyptische Märchen*, Düsseldorf – Köln.
- Busl G. 2012. "Rewriting the *fiaba*: Collective signification in Italo Calvino's *Il castello dei destini incrociati*", *Modern Language Review* 107, 796-814.
- Cannon J. 1979. "Literature as combinatory game: Italo Calvino's *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*", *Critique* 21, 83-92.
- Carbone G. 2005. *Tablioep. Ricerche su gioco e letteratura nel mondo greco-romano*, Napoli.
- Cavallaro D. 2010. *The Mind of Italo Calvino. A Critical Exploration of His Thought and Writings*, Jefferson – London.
- Cellier L. 1964. "Le roman initiatique en France au temps du romantisme", *Cahiers Internationaux de Symbolisme* 4, 22-40.
- Chances E. 1987. "Čexov, Nabokov, and the box: Making a case for Belikov and Lužin", *Russian Language Journal* 140, 135-142.
- Christensen A. 1930. "La légende du sage Buzurjmihir", *Acta Orientalia* 8, 81-128.

- Clouston W.A. 2002. *Popular Tales and Fictions. Their Migrations and Transformations*, C. Goldberg (ed.), Santa Barbara.
- Cohn L. 1894. “Apion (3)”, *RE* I, 2803-2806.
- Conte J.M. 1994. “The uncertain predictor: Calvino’s *Castle* of tarot cards”, D. Bruce – A. Purdy (eds), *Literature and Science*, Amsterdam – Atlanta, 131-147.
- Cosquin E. 1922. *Études folkloriques. Recherches sur les migrations des contes populaires et leur point de départ*, Paris.
- Crist W. – Dunn-Vaturi A.E. – de Voogt A. 2016. *Ancient Egyptians at Play. Board Games Across Borders*, London.
- Damon C. 2008. “The mind of an ass and the impudence of a dog: A scholar gone bad”, I. Sluiter – R.M. Rosen (eds), *Kakos. Badness and Anti-Value in Classical Antiquity*, Leiden, 335-364.
- Damon C. 2011. “Pliny on Apion”, R.K. Gibson – R. Morello (eds), *Pliny the Elder: Themes and Contexts*, Leiden, 131-145.
- Daryaee T. 2002. “Mind, body, and the cosmos: Chess and backgammon in ancient Persia”, *Iranian Studies* 35, 281-312.
- Daryaee T. 2010. *On the Explanation of Chess and Backgammon. Abar Wīzārīšn ī Čatrang ud Nihīšn Nēw-Ardaxšīr*, Beverly Hills.
- Daviau D.G. – Dunkle H.I. 1973. “Stefan Zweig’s ‘Schachnovelle’ ”, *Monatshefte* 65, 370-384.
- Davis D. 2006. *Abolqasem Ferdowsi: Shahnameh. The Persian Book of Kings*, London.
- de Blois F. 1990. *Burzōy’s Voyage to India and the Origin of the Book of Kalīlah wa Dimnah*, London.
- Decker W. 1987. *Sport und Spiel im Alten Ägypten*, München.

- Decker W. – Herb M. 1994. *Bildatlas zum Sport im Alten Ägypten. Corpus der bildlichen Quellen zu Leibesübungen, Spiel, Jagd, Tanz und verwandten Themen*, Leiden.
- Della Seta F. 1983. “Il tempo della festa. Su due scene della ‘Traviata’ e su altri luoghi verdiani”, *Studi Verdiani* 2, 108-146.
- Déom L. 2005. “Le roman initiatique : éléments d’analyse sémiologique et symbolique”, *Cahiers électroniques de l’imaginaire* 3, 73-86.
- Derrett J.D.M. 1963. “Rabelais’ legal learning and the trial of Bridoye”, *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 25, 111-171.
- De Toni M. 2007. “Cornice narrativa e dissoluzione del *récit* in Italo Calvino”, *Studi Novecenteschi* 34, 169-194.
- de Urioste C. 1997. “Totalización del gusto cultural: Dos novelas de Arturo Pérez-Reverte”, *Revista Hispánica Moderna* 50, 403-414.
- Deveny T. 2006. “The club Pérez-Reverte: Screen adaptations of best sellers”, *Hispania* 89, 268-277.
- Dickie M.W. 2001. *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World*, London – New York.
- Dillery J. 2003. “Putting him back together again: Apion historian, Apion *grammatikos*”, *CPh* 98, 383-390.
- Douglas D.B. 1980. “The humanist gambit: A study of Stefan Zweig’s *Schachnovelle*”, *Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association* 53, 17-24.
- Drong L. 2011. “The ill logic of analogy: Uses and abuses of chess in *Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll”, E. Borkowska – T. Burzyński (eds), *The Surplus of Culture. Sense, Common-Sense, Non-Sense*, Newcastle, 49-60.
- Duval E.M. 1997. *The Design of Rabelais’s Tiers Livre de Pantagruel*, Genève.

- Eagleton T. 1972. "Alice and anarchy", *New Blackfriars* 53, 447-455.
- Efthymiadis S. 2012. "A game of dice and a game of chess: A Byzantine *vs.* a Scandinavian allegory", D. Searby – E. Balicka Witakowska – J. Heldt (eds), *Δῶρον ῥοδοποιίκλου. Studies in Honour of Jan Olof Rosenqvist*, Uppsala, 166-174.
- Equestri A. 2014. " 'Sweet lord, you play me false': A chess game in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*", M. Roberts (ed.), *Proceedings of the "Shakespeare and His Contemporaries" Graduate Conference*, Firenze, 1-8.
- Feldt L. 2012. *The Fantastic in Religious Narrative from Exodus to Elisha*, Sheffield.
- García-Caro P. 2000. "Behind the canvas: The role of paintings in Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton* and Arturo Pérez-Reverte's *The Flanders Panel*", A. Mullen – E. O'Beirne (eds), *Crime Scenes. Detective Narratives in European Culture Since 1945*, Amsterdam – Atlanta, 160-170.
- Garnier X. 2004. "À quoi reconnaît-on un récit initiatique ?", *Poétique* 140, 443-454.
- Giovannini E. 2014. "Esilio, frontiere e confini in *La novella degli scacchi* di Stefan Zweig", N. di Nunzio – F. Ragni (eds), "*Già troppe volte esuli*". *Letteratura di frontiera e di esilio*, Perugia, 255-265.
- Goldberg C. 1993. *Turandot's Sisters. A Study of the Folktale AT 851*, London – New York.
- Griffith F.L. 1900. *Stories of the High Priests of Memphis. The Sethon of Herodotus and the Demotic Tales of Khamuas*, Oxford.
- Grignaschi M. 1978. "Deux documents nouveaux à propos de la légende de Buzurğmihir", *AAntHung* 26, 147-184.
- Grimal N. 1994. "Le roi et la sorcière", C. Berger – G. Clerc – N. Grimal (eds), *Hommages à Jean Leclant*, vol. IV, Le Caire, 97-108.
- Guéniot P.G. 2000. "Un jeu clef : la *petteia*", *RPhA* 18, 33-64.

- Gunkel H. 1987. *The Folktale in the Old Testament*, Sheffield.
- Hansen W. 2017. *The Book of Greek & Roman Folktales, Legends, & Myths*, Princeton.
- Harpold T. 2005. "Verne's Cartographies", *Science Fiction Studies* 32, 18-42.
- Haslam M.W. 1994. "The Homer Lexicon of Apollonius Sophista. I. Composition and constituents", *CPh* 89, 1-45.
- Henkle R.B. 1982. "Carroll's narratives underground: 'Modernism' and form", E. Guiliano (ed.), *Lewis Carroll: A Celebration. Essays on the Occasion of the 150th Anniversary of the Birth of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson*, New York, 89-100.
- Hoffmann F. 2000. *Ägypten. Kultur und Lebenswelt in griechisch-römischer Zeit. Eine Darstellung nach den demotischen Quellen*, Berlin.
- Hoffmann F. – Quack J.F. 2018. *Anthologie der demotischen Literatur*, Berlin.
- Holland N.N. 1959. "The Seventh Seal: The film as iconography", *The Hudson Review* 12, 266-270.
- Holm T.L. 2013. *Of Courtiers and Kings. The Biblical Daniel Narratives and Ancient Story-Collections*, Winona Lake.
- Huet M.-H. 2013. "Around the world in eighty spaces", *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 74, 397-414.
- Jacoby F. 1958. *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, vol. III. C, Leiden.
- Keyser P.T. 2015. "Apion of Alexandria (616)", I. Worthington (ed.), *Brill's New Jacoby*, online (<http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/brill-s-new-jacoby/apion-of-alexandria-616-a616>).
- Konstantakos I.M. 2004. "Trial by riddle: The testing of the counsellor and the contest of kings in the legend of Amasis and Bias", *C&M* 55, 85-137.

- Konstantakos I.M. 2008. *Ακίχαρος. Η Διήγηση τοῦ Ἀχικάρ στην ἀρχαία Ἑλλάδα*, vol. I, Athens.
- Konstantakos I.M. 2016. “The magical transformation contest in the ancient storytelling tradition”, *CFC(G)* 26, 207-234.
- Konstantakos I.M. 2019. “The most ancient ‘puzzle magazines’: Miscellanies of intellectual games from *Ahiqar* to Aristophanes”, *Enthymema* 23, 303-347.
- Koskinen M. 2005. “Chess in film: From Hollywood to Ingmar Bergman”, O. Ferm – V. Honemann (eds), *Chess and Allegory in the Middle Ages. A Collection of Essays*, Stockholm, 17-30.
- Krappe A.H. 1941. “Is the story of Aḥīkar the Wise of Indian origin?”, *JAOs* 61, 280-284.
- Kurke L. 1999. “Ancient Greek board games and how to play them”, *CPh* 94, 247-267.
- Lalouette C. 1987. *Textes sacrés et textes profanes de l'ancienne Égypte*, vol. II, Paris.
- Lamer H. 1927. “Lusoria tabula”, *RE* XIII.2, 1900-2029.
- Landthaler B. – Liss H. 1996. “Der Konflikt des Bileam. Irreführungen in der ‘Schachnovelle’ von Stefan Zweig”, *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* n.F. 6, 384-398.
- Lange B.-P. 1993. “Der Meisterdiskurs: Symbolische Herrschaft in Lewis Carrolls *Through the Looking-Glass*”, *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 18, 91-125.
- Laser S. 1987. *Archaeologia Homérica: Sport und Spiel*, Göttingen.
- Lichtheim M. 1980. *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings*, vol. III, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London.

- Liotsakis V. 2012. "Following the king to the underworld: The tale of Rampsinitus (Hdt. II 122) and Ancient Egyptian tradition", *Eikasmos* 23, 139-158.
- Loughrey B. – Taylor N. 1982. "Ferdinand and Miranda at chess", C.M.S. Alexander (ed.), *The Cambridge Shakespeare Library*, vol. II, Cambridge, 30-35.
- Lüders H. 1907. *Das Würfelspiel im alten Indien*, Berlin.
- Ludwich A. 1917. "Über die Homerischen Glossen Apions", *Philologus* 74, 205-247.
- Ludwich A. 1918. "Über die Homerischen Glossen Apions (Schluß)", *Philologus* 75, 95-127.
- Marcotte R.D. 1998. "Anūshīrvān and Buzurgmīhr – The just ruler and the wise counsellor: Two figures of Persian traditional moral literature", *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 51, 69-90.
- Mark M. 2007. "The beginnings of chess", I. Finkel (ed.), *Ancient Board Games in Perspective. Papers from the 1990 British Museum Colloquium, with Additional Contributions*, London, 138-157.
- Markey C. 1999. *Italo Calvino. A Journey Toward Postmodernism*, Gainesville.
- Marx A. 1889. *Griechische Märchen von dankbaren Tieren und Verwandtes*, Stuttgart.
- Maspero G. 2002. *Popular Stories of Ancient Egypt*, H. El-Shamy (ed.), Santa Barbara.
- Matthaios S. 2015. "Greek scholarship in the imperial era and late antiquity", F. Montanari – S. Matthaios – A. Rengakos (eds), *Brill's Companion to Ancient Greek Scholarship*, vol. I, Leiden, 184-296.
- Merkelbach R. 1962. *Roman und Mysterium in der Antike*, München.

- Minkowski C.Z. 2001. "The interrupted sacrifice and the Sanskrit epics", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 29, 169-186.
- Mohl J. 1877. *Le livre des rois par Abou'lkasim Firdousi*, vol. VI, Paris.
- Motlagh D.K. 1990. "Bozorgmehr-e Boktagān", *Encyclopedia Iranica* 4, 427-429.
- Murray H.J.R. 1913. *A History of Chess*, Oxford.
- Needler W. 1953. "A thirty-square draught-board in the Royal Ontario Museum", *JEA* 39, 60-75.
- Neitzel S. 1977. "Apions Γλῶσσαι 'Ομηρικά'", K. Alpers – H. Erbse – A. Kleinlogel (eds), *Sammlung griechischer und lateinischer Grammatiker*, vol. III, Berlin – New York, 185-328.
- Netto J.A. 2004. "Intertextuality and the chess motif: Shakespeare, Middleton, Greenaway", M. Marrapodi (ed.), *Shakespeare, Italy, and Intertextuality*, Manchester, 216-226.
- Noegel S.B. 1996. "Moses and magic: Notes on the Book of Exodus", *JANES* 24, 45-59.
- Nöldeke T. 1892. *Persische Studien. II*, Wien.
- Nyberg H.S. 1964. *A Manual of Pahlavi*, vol. I, Wiesbaden.
- Oltermann P. 2008. "Endgames in a 'hypermodern' age. Stefan Zweig's *Schachnovelle* reconsidered", *KulturPoetik* 8, 170-186.
- O'Sullivan D.E. 2012. "Changing the rules in and of medieval chess allegories", D.E. O'Sullivan (ed.), *Chess in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age. A Fundamental Thought Paradigm of the Premodern World*, Berlin, 199-220.
- Pagliaro A. 1940. "Sulla più antica storia del giuoco degli scacchi", *RSO* 18, 328-340.

- Pagliaro A. 1951. "Il testo pahlavico sul giuoco degli schacchi", *Miscellanea Giovanni Galbiati*, vol. III, Milano, 97-110.
- Panaino A. 1998. *Tessere il cielo. Considerazioni sulle Tavole astronomiche, gli Oroscopi e la Dottrina dei Legamenti tra Induismo, Zoroastrismo, Manicheismo e Mandeismo*, Roma.
- Panaino A. 1999. *La novella degli scacchi e della tavola reale. Un'antica fonte orientale sui due giochi da tavoliere più diffusi nel mondo eurasiatico tra Tardoantico e Medioevo e sulla loro simbologia militare e astrale. Testo pahlavi, traduzione e commento al Wizārīšn ī čatrang ud nīhišn ī nēw-ardaxšīr*, Milano.
- Perrat C. 1954. "Autour du juge Bridoye: Rabelais et le *De nobilitate de Tiraqueau*", *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 16, 41-57.
- Perry J.R. 1986. "Blackmailing Amazons and Dutch pigs: A consideration of epic and folktale motifs in Persian historiography", *Iranian Studies* 19, 155-165.
- Piankoff A. 1974. *The Wandering of the Soul. Texts Translated with Commentary*, Princeton.
- Piccione P.A. 1980. "In search of the meaning of senet", *Archaeology* 33, 55-58.
- Piccione P.A. 1994. "The gaming episode in the *Tale of Setne Khamwas* as religious metaphor", D.P. Silverman (ed.), *For His Ka. Essays Offered in Memory of Klaus Baer*, Chicago, 197-204.
- Piccione P.A. 2007. "The Egyptian game of senet and the migration of the soul", I. Finkel (ed.), *Ancient Board Games in Perspective. Papers from the 1990 British Museum Colloquium, with Additional Contributions*, London, 54-63.
- Pieper M. 1931. "Zum Setna-Roman", *ZÄS* 67, 71-74.
- Pieper M. 1935. *Das ägyptische Märchen. Ursprung und Nachwirkung ältester Märchendichtung bis zur Gegenwart*, Leipzig.

- Pizzi I. 1888. *Firdusi, Il libro dei re. Poema epico recato dal persiano in versi italiani*, vol. VII, Torino.
- Poole W. 2004. "False play: Shakespeare and chess", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55, 50-70.
- Psichari M. 1908. "Les jeux de Gargantua", *Revue des Études Rabelaisiennes* 6, 1-37, 124-181, 317-361.
- Psichari M. 1909. "Les jeux de Gargantua", *Revue des Études Rabelaisiennes* 7, 48-64.
- Pugliese M.V. 2008. "Il fragile potere della scrittura: *Il castello dei destini incrociati* di Italo Calvino", *Italianistica: Rivista di letteratura italiana* 37, 101-109.
- Purcell N. 1995. "Literate games: Roman urban society and the game of *alea*", *P&P* 147, 3-37.
- Pusch E.B. 1979. *Das Senet-Brettspiel im Alten Ägypten*, München.
- Pusch E.B. 1984. "Senet", W. Helck – W. Westendorf (eds), *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, vol. V, Wiesbaden, 851-855.
- Quack J.F. 2005. *Einführung in die altägyptische Literaturgeschichte*, vol. III, Münster.
- Quack J.F. – Ryholt K. 2000. "Notes on the Setne story. P. Carlsberg 207", P.J. Frandsen – K. Ryholt (eds), *A Miscellany of Demotic Texts and Studies*, (The Carlsberg Papyri 3), Copenhagen, 141-163.
- Renello G.P. 2005. "Irretire Calvino: *Il castello dei destini incrociati* e i grafi di Petri", *Narrativa* 27, 209-230.
- Ricci F. 2001. *Painting with Words, Writing with Pictures. Word and Image in the Work of Italo Calvino*, Toronto.
- Ritner R.K. 1993. *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, Chicago.

- Rogers W.N. 1983. "Heroic defense: The lost positions of Nabokov's Luzhin and Kawabata's Shūsai", *Comparative Literature Studies* 20, 217-230.
- Römer T.C. 2003. "Competing magicians in Exodus 7-9: Interpreting magic in the priestly theology", T.E. Klutz (ed.), *Magic in the Biblical World. From the Rod of Aaron to the Ring of Solomon*, London, 12-22.
- Ryholt K. 2009. "The life of Imhotep (P. Carslberg 85)", G. Widmer – D. Devauchelle (eds), *Actes du IX^e congrès international des études démotiques*, Le Caire, 305-315.
- Schädler U. 2002. "The Talmud, Firdausî and the Greek game 'city' ", J. Retschitzki – R. Haddad-Zubel (eds), *Step by Step. Proceedings of the 4th Colloquium Board Games in Academia*, Fribourg, 91-102.
- Scherf W. 1995. *Das Märchenlexikon*, München.
- Schneider M. 1980. "Calvino at a crossroads: *Il castello dei destini incrociati*", *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 95, 73-90.
- Scobie A. 1977. "Some folktales in Graeco-Roman and Far Eastern sources", *Philologus* 121, 1-23.
- Scott J.F. 1965. "The achievement of Ingmar Bergman", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 24, 263-272.
- Screech M.-A. 1964. "The legal comedy of Rabelais in the trial of Bridoye in the 'Tiers Livre' de Pantagruel", *Études Rabelaisiennes* 5, 175-195.
- Serrano Delgado J.M. 2011. "Rhampsinitus, Setne Khamwas and the descent to the netherworld: Some remarks on Herodotus II, 122, 1", *JANER* 11, 94-108.
- Simpson W.K. (ed.) 2003. *The Literature of Ancient Egypt. An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, Stelae, Autobiographies, and Poetry*, New Haven.

- Solem D.E. 1954. "Some Elizabethan game scenes", *Educational Theatre Journal* 6, 15-21.
- Struve G. 1967. "Notes on Nabokov as a Russian writer", *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 8, 153-164.
- Stubbs J.C. 1975. "The Seventh Seal", *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 9, 62-76.
- Susina J. 2010. "Playing around in Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books", *American Journal of Play* 2, 419-428.
- Tait W.J. 1991. "P. Carlsberg 207: Two columns of a Setna-text", P.J. Frandsen (ed.), *The Carlsberg Papyri*, vol. I, Copenhagen, 19-46.
- Tait W.J. 2007. "Were there gamesters in pharaonic Egypt?", I. Finkel (ed.), *Ancient Board Games in Perspective. Papers from the 1990 British Museum Colloquium, with Additional Contributions*, London, 46-53.
- Taylor A.L. 1952. *The White Knight. A Study of C.L. Dodgson*, Edinburgh.
- Thiercy P. 1986. *Aristophane: fiction et dramaturgie*, Paris.
- Tieken H. 2004. "The Mahābhārata after the Great Battle", *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 48, 5-46.
- Toker L. 1989. *Nabokov. The Mystery of Literary Structures*, Ithaca – London.
- Törnqvist E. 1995. *Between Stage and Screen. Ingmar Bergman Directs*, Amsterdam.
- Turcan R. 1963. "Le roman 'initiatique' : À propos d'un livre récent", *RHR* 163, 149-199.
- van Buitenen J.A.B. 1975. *The Mahābhārata. 2 The Book of the Assembly Hall. 3 The Book of the Forest*, Chicago.

- van der Horst P. 2002. *Japheth in the Tents of Shem. Studies on Jewish Hellenism in Antiquity*, Leuven.
- Vanstiphout H. 2003. *Epics of Sumerian Kings. The Matter of Aratta*, Atlanta.
- Vierne S. 1972. “Le voyage initiatique”, *Romantisme* 4, 37-44.
- Vierne S. 1973. *Jules Verne et le roman initiatique*, Paris.
- Vinson S. 2009. “The names ‘Nanferkaptah’, ‘Ihweret’, and ‘Tabubue’ in the ‘First Tale of Setne Khaemwas’ ”, *JNES* 68, 283-304.
- Vinson S. 2018. *The Craft of a Good Scribe. History, Narrative and Meaning in the First Tale of Setne Khaemwas*, Leiden.
- Walsh A.L. 2007. *Arturo Pérez-Reverte. Narrative Tricks and Narrative Strategies*, Woodbridge.
- Warner A.G. – Warner E. 1915. *The Shāhnāma of Firdausī*, vol. VII, London.
- Wilcke C. 2012. *The Sumerian Poem Enmerkar and En-suhkeš-ana: Epic, Play, Or? Stage Craft at the Turn from the Third to the Second Millennium B.C.*, New Haven.
- Wilmot P. 2006. *Mahābhārata, Book Two: The Great Hall*, New York.
- Wood M. 1998. “Hidden in the distance: Reading Calvino reading”, *The Kenyon Review* 20, 155-170.
- Woods J.F. 2001. *Destiny and Human Initiative in the Mahābhārata*, New York.