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## GREEKS, ETRUSCANS, AND CELTS AT PLAY

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## ABSTRACT

With the Etruscan expansion to the Po Valley in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC the Etruria Padana became an area of intercultural exchange between Greece in the East, the Celtic world in the North and West, and central Etruria and other Italian peoples in the south. The Etruscan population welcomed not only Greek goods but also adopted elements of Greek culture and lifestyle – including games. Since the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, a century before the Celtic expansion to Northern Italy, people of Celtic origin installed themselves in the region and, to judge from the burial customs, apparently got well integrated into Etruscan society.

In Etruscan and Celtic graves such as those around Bologna and Spina near Ferrara gaming material such as dice, counters, pebbles, and cowries has been found in great quantities. As far as the history of games is concerned this material may add to a better understanding not only of the games played by the Etruscans of the Certosa period, but also of the possible adoption of Greek games in the Po Valley and their transmission to the Celtic world.

## KEYWORDS

Games,  
dice,  
counters,  
pebbles,  
cowries,  
Etruscans,  
Celts,  
Greeks,  
Spina,  
Bologna,  
Po Valley.

Avec l'expansion étrusque dans la vallée du Pô dans la seconde moitié du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle av. J.-C., l'Étrurie Padane est devenue une zone d'échange interculturel entre la Grèce à l'est, le monde celte au nord et à l'ouest, et l'Étrurie centrale et les autres peuples italiens au sud. La population étrusque a accueilli non seulement des produits grecs, mais aussi des éléments de la culture et du mode de vie grecs, y compris des jeux. Depuis la seconde moitié du V<sup>e</sup> siècle, un siècle avant l'expansion celtique vers le nord de l'Italie, des personnes d'origine celtique se sont installées dans la région et, à en juger par les coutumes funéraires, se sont apparemment bien intégrées dans la société étrusque.

Dans les tombes étrusques et celtiques comme celles de Bologna et Spina près de Ferrare, on a trouvé en grande quantité du matériel de jeu comme des dés, des pions, des cailloux et des cauris. En ce qui concerne l'histoire des jeux, ce matériel peut contribuer à une meilleure compréhension non seulement des jeux joués par les Étrusques de l'époque de Certosa, mais aussi de l'adoption possible des jeux grecs dans la vallée du Pô et de leur transmission au monde celtique.

## MOTS-CLÉS

Jeux,  
dés,  
cailloux,  
pions,  
cauris,  
Étrusques,  
Celts,  
Grecs,  
Spina,  
Bologne,  
vallée du Pô.

Article accepté après évaluation par deux experts selon le principe du double anonymat

With the Etruscan expansion to the Po Valley in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC the Etruria Padana became an area of intercultural exchange between Greece in the East, the Celtic world in the North and West, and central Etruria and other Italian peoples in the south. [1] From the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> Century BC Spina became a major emporium for trade with Greece, and Greeks installed themselves there. [2] The newly founded town of Felsina (Bologna) became an important centre, even, according to Pliny (III 115), the leading city of all Etruria. The Etruscan population welcomed not only Greek goods but also adopted elements of Greek culture and lifestyle. During the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century the presence of people of Celtic origin is attested, before the Celtic expansion in the early 4<sup>th</sup> Century and the conquest of Felsina by the Boi changed the situation in the region.

In Etruscan and Celtic graves such as those around Bologna and Spina near Ferrara gaming material such as dice, counters, pebbles, and cowries has been found in great quantities. [3] As far as the history of games is concerned all these aspects make the region interesting, not only with regard to the games played by the Etruscans of the Certosa period, but also concerning the possible adoption of Greek games in the Po Valley and thence further transmission to the Celtic world.

Several Etruscan burial sites were excavated in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in and around Bologna. These sites are known by the name of the owners of the ground, such as Arnoaldi, De Luca, Battistini, Aureli, and Benacci, or by their geographic situation with regard to buildings and places such as the Certosa, the Arsenale militare, Via dei Mille or the Giardini Margherita. Only part of the burials have been thoroughly studied and published. [4] I draw basically on the publications by Antonio Zannoni of the Certosa burials, by Daniele Vitali about the Celtic graves in and around Bologna, on Roberto Macellari's

publication of the Arnoaldi site, as well as Giovanna Bertrand Montanari's catalogue of the few Battistini graves. [5] The De Luca burials have recently been the subject of a doctoral thesis by Giulia Morpurgo, published in 2018. [6] Some specialised studies provide further helpful information, but one still depends on the preliminary excavation reports of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. [7] As far as Spina is concerned, only a small part of the more than 4000 burials excavated in Valle Trebba and Valle Pega during the 1920s and 1930s have been published so far, [8] so that we are left with Salvatore Aurigemma's publication of part of the Valle Trebba burials and some partial studies. [9] None of these authors, however, was particularly interested in the gaming material, so that they do not always provide all of the useful information: for example the shape of dice and the configuration of the spots or the colours of counters are not systematically indicated, nor is the exact position of the objects in the grave in relation to the body or other grave goods always given. Further problems concern the dating of the burial and the identification of the sex of the grave owner, mainly achieved on the basis of the grave goods: [10] Although the chronology of the Greek pottery often present in the graves is well established, it is not always evident to see how long after their making these vases were deposited in the grave. Usually, a date relatively close to the latest pottery is proposed.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is basically to provide a preliminary catalogue of as many graves with game related material as possible, based on publications hitherto available, including the permanent exhibitions of both the Museo Civico Archeologico di Bologna and the Museo Nazionale Archeologico di Ferrara. Though incomplete, such a catalogue can pave a broader ground for discussion and delineates the horizon for the few graves that have recently been discussed in the context of the history of Celtic

[1] For an overview see SASSATELLI 1990.

[2] See a.e. HAACK 2009.

[3] Recently, some of these finds have been discussed in two game-related papers: DUGGAN 2015; GILL 2016.

[4] For an overview see MACELLARI 1999: 13-28.

[5] VITALI 1992; MACELLARI 2002; MONTANARI 1950-1951.

[6] MORPURGO 2011; MORPURGO 2018. I am indebted to Giulia Morpurgo who granted me insight into her book

and provided me with useful information prior to its publication.

[7] For example: GHIRARDINI 1910: 381-382 (Via dei Mille).

[8] Pozzi 2011: 11.

[9] AURIGEMMA 1960; AURIGEMMA 1965; Pozzi 2011; UGGERI 1978; Spina. Storia di una città 1993: 271-272, 277, 285, 291, 305. See also: BERTI 1994.

[10] For further information see: MUGGIA 2004: 199-206.



Figure 1. Three groups of sic glass counters and three dice from burial Arnoaldi 132.  
Museo Civico Archeologico di Bologna,  
Photograph by Marco Ravenna.



Figure 2. Four groups of six glass counters and two dice from burial Arnoaldi 128.  
Museo Civico Archeologico di Bologna,  
Photograph by Laura Minarini.

games. [11] A comprehensive study would have to start with an autopsy of the excavation diaries, in order to be able not only to catalogue the game related finds, but also to analyse their relation to other grave goods, to anthropological data (sex and age of the deceased), to the social status, to the burial rites (inhumation, cremation), the typology of the grave and to determine the date and provenance of the objects. Based on the catalogue, I would then like to forward some preliminary observations and raise some questions.

## GAME RELATED FINDS FROM THE ETRURIA PADANA

### COUNTERS

The material that can be linked to dice and board games consists of counters made of glass paste or stone, pebbles, dice and possibly cowries.

The glass counters are hemispherical with a more or less flat base, with (Arnoaldi 79, 88, 118, 121, 128, 132) or without (Arn 110, 114) a depression in the centre of the base, according to the production process. Most of the glass counters are plain and of white, yellow, blue or green colour. Some are distinguished by a special decoration. The 15 counters found in the so-called "Tomba dello sgabello" in the Giardini Margherita (end of the 6<sup>th</sup>/early 5<sup>th</sup> Century BC) are blue and green and decorated with white dots. Three counters from Certosa (Cert) 317 have green dots. The same green dots are found on six counters from the "Tomba grande" in the Giardini Margherita (after 450), while three have green intersecting lines and three are plain. Six counters from Arn 132 (**fig. 1**) have white dots, while Arn 128 (**fig. 2**) produced five dark blue

counters with orange dots and one decorated with two orange intersecting lines; both burials dating to the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century. Dotted counters have also been found in Cert 66 (first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century) and De Luca 110. From a technical point of view, it may be interesting to stress that dots and lines are not applied on the surface of the counter but inlaid in small holes and grooves! Perhaps the same technique can be observed when looking at the set of amber counters exhibited in the Museum Ferrara: the set consists of four types of counters: two plain counters, two with one hole, three with two holes and three with three holes are preserved. I presume that the holes were meant to be filled with glass paste, similar to some of the counters from De Luca 110. A very special counter with an applied green spiral over yellow intersecting lines comes from Cert 337 (early 5<sup>th</sup> Century).

Another type of decoration was found in Sasso Marconi: in a grave from the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, three glass paste counters divided into four black and white "pie slices" and crossed by two intersecting green and white lines have been found together with three counters with white dots and a green dot on top, and two counters with intersecting white and green lines. [12]

Yet a further type of decoration is the one by coloured bands, applied to the molten surface of the counter, which produces a swirling, marbled pattern. Counters of this type have been found in Certosa 317 (end of the 6<sup>th</sup>/early 5<sup>th</sup> centuries), Valle Pega 18C (c 450-430), and VP 134D (4<sup>th</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> Century). This type is also known from Celtic male and female graves in Perugia,

[11] DUGGAN 2015; GILL 2016.

[12] GENTILI 1970: 241-249.



Figure 3. Pebbles from burial Certosa 392.  
Museo Civico Archeologico di Bologna,  
Photograph by Marco Ravenna.



Figure 4. Pebbles from burial Arnoaldi 110.  
Museo Civico Archeologico di Bologna,  
Photograph by Laura Minarini.

Montefortino, and Todi, and seems to have travelled even north and west of the Alps. **[13]** We see that these glass counters, including those belonging to the earliest glass counters found in the Etruscan cemeteries at Bologna, demonstrate highly sophisticated glass making.

As far as I know, no analyses have been made to determine the provenance of these counters. The existence of an Etruscan glass industry is not firmly established, while the small glass vessels (aryballoi, amphoriskoi) found in Spina, Bologna and Marzabotto are usually identified as Eastern Greek or Phoenician imports. **[14]** However, some chemical analyses of other glass objects from the Etruscan cemeteries of Spina and Bologna, such as small vessels and beads, have been made over the last years. **[15]** A comparison of this material with core-formed Rhodian glass from the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries preserved in the Louvre has shown that from a chemical point of view, the vessels are very homogeneous in their composition, the beads a little less, which, to be cautious is best explained by

a common origin of the raw material used. **[16]** This leaves us for the moment without a definite answer to the question of whether or not these gaming counters were locally produced **[17]** or imported from Eastern Greece or even Phoenicia.

Polished pebbles in different sizes, shapes and colours also appear frequently among the grave goods. It is not always clear whether or not they were used as gaming devices (counters for example), since they are found without dice much more often than glass counters are. **[18]** This is the case for example with 18 pebbles in grave Cert 3, 15 pebbles in Cert 318, 24 in Cert 392 (**fig. 3**), 14 from Giardini Margherita 17, 20 from Valle Trebba (VT) 77, and 13 from VT 603. In some cases the pebbles come in a bunch of a great variety of colours, sizes and shapes, as in Cert 3, 7, 27, 110, 151, 318, and 392 or VP 28D, VP 212B, VT 603 and De Luca 110. Since it is hard to imagine them being used as counters in a board game, they may simply have been collected for their beauty.

**[13]** Perugia: NATI 2008: 92 2.11, 117-118 5.8, 129 7.7, 162-163 1.21. Montefortino: BRIZIO 1899: 682, Tav. 5. 10, 10a, 10b, 11 (tomba XXIII, female); *ibid.*: 699 Tav. 11. Todi: FIORELLI 1881a. See also DILIBERTO & LÉJARS 2013: 445 fig. 5, 446-447.

**[14]** FRONTINI 1986: 236-237.

**[15]** ARLETTI, VEZZALINI, QUARTIERI, FERRARI, MERLINI & COTTE 2008; ARLETTI, RIVI, FERRARI

& VEZZALINI 2011; ARLETTI, MAIORANO, FERRARI, VEZZALINI & QUARTIERI 2010.

**[16]** ARLETTI, BELLESIA & NENNA 2012: 60 figs. 2-3, 61.

**[17]** FERRARI 1998.

**[18]** Gozzadini says he found some also in Villanovian graves: GOZZADINI 1856: 11.

Other pebbles, however, have been worked in order to give them a uniform shape. Arn 110 (fig. 4) and 114 for example contain counters, which have been described by the excavators of similar counters found in Perugia as having the size and shape of pigeons' eggs. [19] The pebbles of Cert 19, De Luca 9 and VP 483 are oval and flat. It is very likely that these pebbles were intentionally treated in order to use them as counters. Additionally, some groups of pebbles can easily be grouped by their colours and/or were deposited together with dice, which makes their function as counters very likely. In Cert 151 for example four different coloured groups of six pebbles were found together with two cubic dice. In Cert 110 two cubic dice lay among seven pebbles. Two red, two blue and two green pebbles were found in VT 18 together with two Etruscan type dice. The association of five pebbles with five glass counters and a cubic die from grave Cert 385, which may indicate that pebbles and counters belonged to opposite players in the same, is also relevant.

Pebbles are not, as one might be tempted to assume, a cheaper substitute for glass counters: Cert 27 (late 6<sup>th</sup>/early 5<sup>th</sup> Century) with twelve pebbles is one of the richer Bolognese graves, as is VT 128 (end of 5<sup>th</sup> Century) in Spina. VT 18 (c420), VT 603 (c480), and VT 203 (c440) also contained precious grave goods. Macellari pointed to the fact that as far as the Arnoaldi cemetery is concerned, pebbles seem to appear only in women's graves [20], an assumption that would have to be verified and checked against the other cemeteries.

Seven cowries were found together with 13 glass counters and a die of Etruscan type lying close to the left hand of the deceased in VT 203. Five cowries and 17 pebbles were found together with two oblong dice in VP 212B. 16 pebbles, four shells, four cowries and two oblong dice come from VT 65, most likely an adolescent grave. [21] And in VP 18C 11 cowries, 14 glass counters and two oblong dice were found. Other burials – VT 374 (21 cowries), VT 857 (two or three cowries), Cert 304 (3 cowries) – provided cowries without any other game related objects. In these cases, it is difficult to determine their function since cowries were also used as applications for clothes (see Cert 110, Zannoni 2, pl. LI) or elements of jewellery.

[19] CARATTOLI 1886: 410: "...della forma e dimensione di uova di piccione...".

[20] MACELLARI 2002: 231.

[21] MUGGIA 2004: 219-220.

[22] Three bone discs in Arn 58 and 8 bone discs in Cert 47 are for ornamental and other use.

[23] GOZZADINI 1870: 40.

Counters similar in shape to glass counters, but made of stone are found more particularly in burials of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries: 17 from Ceretolo 1877/1, 22 from Benacci 953, eight (or nine) from Benacci Caprara 1, and seven from VT 369, a rich grave from the late 4<sup>th</sup> Century, equipped with a lot of indigenous pottery. Exceptions are seven limestone counters from De Luca 9, dating to the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, and Arn 110 (fig. 4), probably dating to the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, which produced 16 (5, 5, 6) stone counters. Could it be that with the decline of Greek imports the supply of glass counters became more difficult?

Bone discs, the most frequent type of counters in Roman times, do not occur as gaming pieces. [22]

Anna Muggia analysed children's and adolescents' graves from Valle Trebba. In these graves, knucklebones appear in nine graves (i.e. 9,9% of the total). More often shells (*glycymeris*), which were found in 27 (29,7%) graves of both sexes. In six burials knucklebones and shells were associated. Knucklebones are known to be a favourite children's toy in antiquity, so the shells should also be regarded as something with which children played, even if shells do sometimes also appear in adults' graves.

## DICE

In most cases one to three dice made of bone or ivory accompany the counters, which is more regularly the case with glass counters than with pebbles. Three types of dice can be distinguished:

1. The typical Etruscan die is a flat rectangular solid, thus having two broad faces, two narrow and two small faces, a shape Gozzadini described as similar to Domino tiles. [23] Normally the points, indicated by one or two circles around a dot, are distributed 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, i.e. one opposite to two and so on, with the broad faces counting 5 and 6. Some of these dice have no points at all instead of 5 on the face opposite the 6 (Arn 118, 132 [fig. 1], 150, 151; Ars 6). And some – sometimes the same – do not have 1 nor 2, but large concentric circles on both faces (Arn 88, 119, 132 [fig. 1]; Ars 6). Due to the flatness of the shape, the points for the values 2, 3, and 4 are placed in line. But as soon as the dimensions allow, these points are indicated in the "normal" way, i.e. 2 and 3 diagonally and 4 with the dots placed in the corners (Arn 112, 118, 126, 128 [fig. 2], 132 [fig. 1]). In most cases the die will come to lie on the two broader faces showing 5 and 6. These traditional Etruscan dice were still in use well into the 4<sup>th</sup> Century (Cert 66: Celtic!).

2. Oblong dice, rectangular in shape with a more or less square base, share the same characteristics with



Figure 5.  
Glass counters and  
a die from burial  
Certosa 337.  
Museo Civico  
Archeologico di  
Bologna, Photograph  
by Marco Ravenna.

the type previously described but are more regular, so that the die will usually come to lie on four of the six faces.

3. Cubic dice appear at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BC, both at Spina and Felsina. In grave Valle Pega 72D from Spina, two cubic dice were recovered. One of them has the unusual point configuration 1-3, 2-4, 5-6, while the other one follows the standard Etruscan pattern\_1-2, 3-4, 5-6. [24] Both cubic dice from Cert 7 have also the Etruscan pattern 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, while the two dice from Cert 110, found together with 24 pebbles, have Blank-2, 3-4, 5-6. The later standard distribution 1-6, 2-5, 3-4 already appears at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century on a cubic die, found along with two oblong dice of the Etruscan pattern in Cert 317, and on one from Cert 337 (fig. 5). But only since the last quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century do cubic dice typically show the later standard distribution 1-6, 2-5, 3-4 (VT 264, VP 136A, VP 134D, Arn 58, Benacci 953). The Etruscan die remains the dominant type during the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, after which the cubic die with the standard spot configuration took the lead. Stick dice in the shape of two or three dice in a row ("tessere a tre dadi"), common more to the south of the Apennines, apparently were not in use in the Po Valley. [25]

In most graves that produced gaming material dice appear to be associated with counters. Second in line are counters without dice, which appear more often than dice only. I do not think that this observation gives us any clue as to the nature of the games played. With counters and dice someone would simply be perfectly equipped for both: board games with or without dice and pure dice games as well.

In many cases, bronze handles have been recorded, usually taken as handles for *cistae* or *situlae*. [26] On the other hand wooden game boards were sometimes also equipped with one or two bronze handles. A good example is the game board depicted in relief in the

Tomba dei Rilievi: it is equipped with two handles, one on one of the short sides, the other one on the long edge of the board. [27] In the same way two handles are attached to the board depicted on an Etruscan bronze mirror in Milan. [28] Although from a later date, the so-called "warrior's grave" in Stanway and grave 2 in Alton provide further examples. [29] The wooden game board that served as model for the one incised into a marble table in Ephesus, dating to the 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. AD, was a folding board with two omega-shaped handles. [30] Game boards with bronze handles are also attested from burials in the Germania libera (as for ex. Gommern, Neudorf-Bornstein, Aasø). Therefore, one might raise the question whether some of these bronze handles might indicate the former presence of a game board. Particularly striking seems to be Cert 110: According to Zannoni, the pebbles lay close to the left hand (h in Tav. LI); nearby a bronze handle was found with a lot of empty space towards the side where a game board might be expected.

Another intriguing context is burial VT 577 from the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century. Near the right hand of the body, some pebbles and a die had been deposited. At the same spot four cylindrical bronze elements

[24] The distribution of the points is not always given in the publications.

[25] For these dice see for example: PAOLUCCI & RASTRELLI 1999: 81.90 n° II.46 fig., 137; n° II.49-51 fig., 138 (necropoli di via Montale, tomba 2, 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century); *ibid.* 45-46 Cat. n° 10.8 fig., 45 and 121 (necropoli della Pedata, tomba 10, end 6<sup>th</sup>/early 5<sup>th</sup> cent.); MINETTI 1997: 79 fig. 82 (necropolis della Palazzina, tomba 13); MINETTI & RASTRELLI 2001: 17, 32 fig. 13.29.

[26] See HOSTETTER 1986, pl. 51-57.

[27] BLANCK & PROIETTI 1986: 27 tav. Vb, Xia.

[28] GERHARD 1897: 144-146 pl. 109.

[29] SCHÄDLER 2007: 359-360; MILLETT 1986: 51-56 with fig. 11.

[30] SCHÄDLER 2016: 519-523.

were found still in place and forming a square (see Aurigemma's drawing p. 66). Such bronze rings appear frequently among the grave goods and are usually interpreted as feet for furniture such as stools and tables, since sometimes they still contain traces of wood. Aurigemma supposed that they belonged to a wooden box or table, on top of which the pebbles, the die and two cups and a *phiale* were placed. As Eddie Duggan suggested, one might also think of a game board instead, which the gaming pieces were laid upon.

## CELTS IN THE PADANA [31]

Among the first Celtic burials in Felsina are Arn 127 (1885/1) and Arn 128 (1885/4), dating to roughly the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century. Arn 127 (1885/1) contained two dice of the Etruscan type and one fragmented die. According to Vitali, the finger rings and the *gancio di cintura* points to the Marne/Champagne region as the origin of the deceased. [32] Arn 128 (1885/4) produced four groups of six glass counters in different colours and two Etruscan dice (fig. 2). The contents of these graves testify to the presence of Celts who obviously were well integrated into the local society, since they adopted local burial practices and grave goods, including the "Etruscan" gaming material.

Other Celtic burials date to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, the period during and after the Celtic invasion of the Po Valley. Dating to the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, Ceretolo 1877/1 produced 17 limestone counters. Cert 66 also dates to the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century and some of the grave goods find parallels in transalpine Switzerland. [33] It produced two glass counters (one of them yellow) and an Etruscan die (1-2, 3-4, 5-6), which is a remarkably late example of this type of die. One of the richest Celtic graves around Bologna is Benacci 953, dating to the early 3<sup>rd</sup> Century. Among *instrumentum* for the symposium, of military and athletic character also 22 limestone counters and three cubic dice were found. They had been placed between the symposium ware and the weapons along the right side of the body. Similar and contemporary is Benacci-Caprara 1 with 8 limestone counters.

These burials testify to an etruscized Celtic population, which, judging from the grave goods, together with the Etruscan lifestyle adopted its originally Greek elements including the symposium and the games such as *kottabos* and board and dice games.

## A GREEK BOARD GAME IN ETRURIA?

Board games are attested in the Etruscan iconography since the late 6<sup>th</sup> Century. [34] But only three representations reveal details about the game board. The relief in the "Tomba dei Rilievi" shows a large game board with a bag, which probably served for storing dice and counters. The playing surface is organised in eleven parallel lines. Similar lined game boards are depicted on two well-known bronze mirrors: On an Etruscan mirror preserved in the Soprintendenza ABAP in Milan Achilles and Ajax are holding a game board with seven parallel lines on their knees. [35] On both sides each line ends in a circle representing a counter or a depression in which to place one, while two rectangular objects depicted between the lines can be interpreted as dice. Similarly, a Praenestine mirror in the British Museum shows a couple playing on a board with twelve parallel lines ending in small circles. [36] The lined board is the only type of game board attested from Etruscan sites.

Such game boards with parallel lines are likely to belong to the "pente grammai" type of game, a Greek board game played with dice described by Pollux. [37] He tells us that both players had five counters on the five lined board – in the same way it is depicted on a *kyathos* in Bruxelles – and that the line in the middle was called the "sacred line". A number of boards with five parallel lines have been identified among the archaeological record, incised into floors or painted on miniature gaming tables, often with the lines ending at both ends in a small depression or circle to hold one counter. But also enlarged versions with nine and 11 lines are known from Greece: On the miniature terracotta gaming table from Athens kept in the Danish National Museum in Copenhagen one counter is placed on both ends of nine parallel lines. A gaming table in the Asklepieion at Epidauros originally had two "Five

[31] See recently DUGGAN 2015: 27-38.

[32] VITALI 1992: 395.

[33] ZANNONI 1876.

[34] CERCHIAI 2008: 91-105. However, I would like to express some doubts concerning the interpretation of the lower scene of the "stela dell'antella" Peruzzi as a gaming scene (see MAGI 1932: 17 n. 14 tav. X).

[35] Gustav KÖRTE in GERHARD 1897: 144-146 pl. 109; MANSUELLI 1946-1947: 58.

[36] SCHÄDLER 2012 with bib. The number of lines is certainly erroneous, because the type of game necessitates an odd number of lines, see below.

[37] KÖRTE 1897: 145. For the game see SCHÄDLER 2009a: 169-192.



Lines"-boards, to one of which six more lines were added at a later date. [38] Recently, another Athenian miniature terracotta gaming table contemporary to the one in Copenhagen, was sold by auction in London: it shows eleven parallel lines ending in circles. [39] A similar table is kept in the Archaeological Museum at Brauron. "Pente grammai" is the game the "brettspielende Helden" play on the numerous Athenian black-figure vases, of which many have been found in Etruria.

It seems therefore that the Etruscans since the 6<sup>th</sup> Century knew and played a Greek board game played with dice and counters on a board with an odd number of parallel lines. The association of counters and dice in the graves may corroborate this conclusion. The question is whether they played the game according to similar rules as those given by Pollux and Eustathios for "Five lines" or according to different rules.

## OBSERVATIONS

In the discussion about the role of games and the culture of play in the Etruscan society, the games are often linked to the symposium and to the political, economic, and military elite. [40] In many graves, which produced dice and/or counters, utensils for the symposium form a significant part of the grave goods, testifying to the importance of what the members of the Etruscan as well as the Celtic leading classes considered to be a Greek symposium. One Greek game formed an integral part of the banquet – the *kottabos*, attested by Etruscan wall paintings and several stands that have been found in Etruscan and Celtic graves. [41] Judging from the burials, it seems therefore that board and dice games were also practiced in the same context. As a matter of fact, in VT 617 (late 5<sup>th</sup> cent.) for example, dice and counters lay at the right-hand side and among tableware. In Cert 108 (2<sup>nd</sup> qu. 5<sup>th</sup> cent.) the counters and dice were placed in the middle between the symposium ware and the candelabra. [42] On the other hand, gaming material was also found at a distance from the symposium ware instead. This is the case for example in VT 680, where 13 pebbles and three dice were placed

to the left of the body, while the tableware was on the other side. In VT 1014 two counters and two dice were placed at a certain distance from the rest of the grave goods. [43] In Cert 27 twelve pebbles lay close to the right knee, while the rest of the grave goods were placed to the left of the body and below the feet. [44] In Cert 318, the 15 limestone pebbles were placed at the lower end of the chamber, far away from everything else in the grave. [45] In the Celtic warrior grave Benacci 953, too, dice and counters were placed in the middle between the weapons at the right of the legs and the symposium utensils at the right of the head. [46] In two burials from Perugia, we find the counters and dice placed beneath the feet together with personal belongings. [47] Usually though the gaming pieces were placed near the right or left hand (see for example Cert 19, 66, 110, 337; VT 128, 203, 271, 512, 577, 603, 617, 680, 784, 915, 931), ready to be used. Considering that the position of the gaming material in the graves was meaningfully constituted, this might perhaps mean that these games were played not only in the context of the symposium but also on other occasions.

Drawing conclusions about the nature and rules of the games based on the number of counters and dice found in graves poses obvious problems. [48] First of all we cannot be sure that the number of counters retrieved always corresponds to the original number deposited in the grave: small glass counters and pebbles are easily overlooked, especially during excavations under unfavourable weather conditions or with high groundwater level. Moreover, many graves have been sacked in antiquity, which might also have led to a loss. Not forgetting that we do not even know, who exactly placed the counters in the grave and where that person got them. Apparently, scholars are inclined to think that they once belonged to the deceased and that they were placed in order to make sense for him or her or for those who participated in the funeral. In most cases, the number of counters is in no relation whatsoever to any known board game, especially when there are only a handful of them or an uneven number of pieces or unequal numbers of colours. [49] It is possible that counters were placed just to represent a

[38] BLINKENBERG 1898: 3-4 nr. 2, 6-12.

[39] BONHAMS 2017: 67 lot 94. The table is now kept in the Swiss Museum of Games, La Tour-de-Peilz.

[40] GILL 2016: 105-106; CHERICI 2001: 183-188; CERCHIAI 2008: 93.

[41] See: AMBROSINI 2013: 1-38.

[42] ZANNONI 1876: vol. 2, tav. L.

[43] POZZI 2011: 254-256.

[44] ZANNONI 1876: vol. 2, tav. XIX.

[45] *Ibid.*: vol. 2, tav. CVII.

[46] VITALI 1992: 285, 288.

[47] BRIZIO, 1899: 682 tomba XXIII tav. V: 699 tomba XXXV tav. XI.1.

[48] See SCHÄDLER 2007.

[49] Considering the incomplete documentation available, with only part of the burials published and missing or contradictory numbers of counters given, it makes no sense to draw too much on precise statistics.



board game with counters, especially when there are only a few of them like the dotted one and the yellow one from VT 308, which was perhaps simply meant as one of each kind. In other cases it looks as if one or more counters were deliberately omitted from the set (Arn 80 [fig. 6], Arn 110 [fig. 4]), perhaps with the intention to remove the game from secular use or with the idea to give an advantage to the deceased in case he would play the game in the afterlife.

Nonetheless, sometimes counters and pebbles come in groups of different colours. Arn 110 (fig. 4) contained three groups of five, five and six pebbles; Arn 132 (fig. 1) produced six white, six blue and six dotted counters together with three dice. From the *tomba grande* in the Giardini Margherita come three dark green counters, six dark green counters with a dot, five dark green counters with lines and three Etruscan dice; from Arsenale 6 six white, six turquoise, six dotted counters and three oblong dice. And in VT 18 two red, two green and two grey pebbles plus two dice were found.

Four groups of six green, blue, white and decorated counters, associated with two dice remain from Arn 128 (1885/4 [fig. 2]; but note: of twenty-six that had been found, only twenty-four are preserved). Arn 80 (the so-called "grave of the panathenaic amphoras", [fig. 6]) contained five yellow, five green, five blue and six white counters. Arsenale 4 preserved six green, six white, five turquoise and nine blue counters with two oblong dice, and Cert 151 four groups of six different coloured pebbles plus two Etruscan dice.

A certain preference for the number six seems to emerge from these data. Already one hundred years ago, this led Alessandro Della Seta to assume that they must have belonged to a game that required six counters per player. [50] On the other hand, the remarkable amber set in the Museum Ferrara looks as if the set once consisted of four groups of three counters. Eddie Duggan, trying to find precursors of the Welwyn Garden City counters, suggested that these groups of counters "may be examples of a hitherto overlooked four-player game". [51] But what is to be done with the counters divided into three groups only, as those from the burials cited above and from Sasso Marconi 1? A three-player board game is rather unlikely to have existed in antiquity.

It is intriguing that we do not know of any board games for four players from the Graeco-Roman world. All the iconographic representations of board game players, Greek as well as Etruscan, show two players only. Nor do we know a board game played with six counters per side. Assuming that game boards mentioned above are enlarged variants of "Five Lines", one would need five, seven, nine or eleven counters per player – but never six, if the principle indicated by Pollux was followed, that both players had as many counters as there were lines on the board. The contacts between the Etruria Padana and Greece and the Greeks

[50] DELLA SETA 1918: 450.

[51] DUGGAN 2015: 17.

were so close during the Certosa period, that it is hard to imagine that Greek rules of the games remained unknown to the Etruscans. But since the Etruscans obviously made their own rules as far as the symposium is concerned – the presence of women for example – they also might have made up their own rules for board games. Therefore, we have perhaps to reckon with games of which no literary or iconographic evidence exists.

Some strange dice may be mentioned in this context that may point to some particular games, which required unusual material. In a burial in Brindisi (contrada Paradiso) three cubic dice were found, two of which with the modern spot configuration, while the third one bears the numbers 1-1, 3-3, 5-5. [52] And Emil Braun reports the find of two dice from Palestrina, with the spot configuration 1-1, 5-5, 6-6 and 2-2, 3-3, 4-4 respectively. [53]

None of these “sets” of counters indicates the presence of a special gaming piece, which would have a particular function in the game. [54] One exception is the outstanding counter from Cert 337 (early 5<sup>th</sup> Century, fig. 5). But if a special piece were an inherent element of the game, one would expect it to appear more often, if not regularly. Therefore, the one counter from Cert 337 is best explained as an individual gift from a friend or a member of the family or even a collectible.

Various scholars stressed the significance of board games as a status symbol and identity generating element for the Etruscan but also for the etruscized Celtic élites. [55] Characterized by an imminent antagonism, board games seem to have transported values linked to warfare and athletics on the one hand and to a privileged lifestyle on the other. Cherici stressed the parallels of the lined game boards and the “brettspielende Helden”, who were warriors as well as athletes, very popular in Etruria. For him, the board games of the upper classes were a simulation of war [56] and the knowledge of their rules, restricted to a group of initiated, would have contributed to the identity of the military elite. The image of the heroes playing “Five Lines” is certainly linked to

an Aristocratic value system, which seems to have been understood and appreciated by the Etruscan elite. [57] However, without taking into account the important element of chance and destiny, which is inherent in their game, neither the iconography of the “brettspielende Helden” nor the significance of the games on the lined board for the Etruscan and Celtic élite can be completely understood. “Five Lines”-type games are certainly not a simulation of war as Cherici and Cerchiali suggested [58], even if a competitive element is often present in two player board games. In this type of game, not only strategic skill will decide the outcome, but chance (which is not identical to pure hazard) has its say. In the case of Ajax and Achilles it is Achilles’ privileged relationship to the gods that decides in his favour. [59] The fact that they are privileged by the gods is a constitutive element of aristocratic identity.

Cerchiali sees the players in the context of a male, adult group, devoted to an activity principally for old men: once retired from active military service, they would play war games as a substitute, a war simulation. In his view the Helden symbolize the values of the *polis*, and the players see themselves as the new founders of the *polis*. The game board would signify the *polis* and the *pestoi* the citizens (*politai*). He points to variants of the scene where Athenian citizens replaced Ajax and Achilles. I think that this substitution has nothing to do with *polis* values, but with the conviction that destiny is what unites heroes as well as “normal” citizens. In Athens, the heroes disappear from the vases after the Persian wars along with the rise of the Athenian democracy, which also gave birth to a new game: *Polis*. The concept of board and pieces representing the *polis* and the *politai* developed in the framework of this game, and cannot be applied to the archaic “Five Lines” game. Lastly, the games should not only be considered within the framework of male values such as warfare and athletics, since gaming material was also and relatively often found in Etruscan female burials. [60] The society must have regarded adequate to place gaming pieces in women’s graves. ■

[52] FIORELLI 1881b: 374.

[53] BRAUN 1855: XLVI.

[54] See SCHÄDLER 2009a: 185-187, against Leslie Kurke’s proposal of a “king piece” (KURKE 1999: 263-264) in “Pente Grammai”.

[55] KURKE 1999: 247-267; CHERICI 2001: 179-191, esp. 185; CERCHIAI 2008; DASEN 2015.

[56] However, he mixed up (p. 186-187) the sources about the Roman games *Latrunculi* and *XII Scripta* and

obviously misunderstood Isidore’s description of *Alea*, which is a variant of *XII scripta*, i.e. a game of the backgammon family, and not at all played on a “chess board” (“scacchiera”).

[57] CERCHIAI 2008: 93.

[58] CHERICI 2001: 187.

[59] See SCHÄDLER 2009b and DASEN 2015.

[60] The distinction of the sexes is in most cases based on the grave goods.

## GRAVES WITH GAMING FINDS FROM BOLOGNA AND SPINA

Grave N.	Date approx.	Counters	Dice	Handles
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### Spina, Valle Trebba

VT 931	500-450	6 (7) white pebbles		
VT 221	early 5 <sup>th</sup>	7 pebbles	2 cubic	
VT 603	c480	13 pebbles (11 black, 2 light grey)		1
VT 680	475-470	13 pebbles white and dark	3 rect., ivory	
VT 313	475-50		2 rect. ivory	1 omega shape
VT 394	475-25		1 rect.?	1
VT 528	470-50		3 cubic	
VT 308	c460	2 glass (1 blue, 1 yellow)	1 rect.	
VT 65	460-50	16 pebbles 4 shells 4 cowries	2 oblong	
VT 577	460-50	4 pebbles	1 rect.	
VT 392	450-25	4 pebbles (2 dark, 2 lighter)	1 rect.	1
VT 784	450-400	9 glass	1 cubic	
VT 203	c440	13 (14) pebbles; 12 blue-green, 2 light-coloured 7 shells	1 rect.	
VT 558	440-30	8 pebbles: 4 irregular, 4 white		1
VT 617	440-20 480 (Berti 1983)	5 glass (4 green, 1 yellow)	2 rect.	1
VT1052	440-400		1 oblong?	
VT 271	430-20	23 (22: Negroli) pebbles white and dark blue	2 cubic	1 situla or cista handle
VT 512	430-400	2 glass (blue)		1
VT 915	430-400	3		
VT 264	425-400	3 (1 glass grey, 2 pebbles?)	2 cubic standard	1
VT 611	425-400		1, ivory	
VT 77	c420	20 pebbles		
VT 128	420 /end 5 <sup>th</sup>	6 pebbles	2 flat, ivory	1
VT 1014	end 4 <sup>th</sup> - early 3 <sup>rd</sup>	2 glass	2 cubic standard	
VT 369	330-300	7 stone	2 cubic, bone, standard	
VT 580		9 pebbles, 5 shells	1 cubic	
VT 320	250-200	1 pebble		
VT1040			2 astragals	

### Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Ferrara

VT 18	420	6 pebbles: 2 red, 2 green, 2 grey	2, numbers illegible	1
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### Spina, Valle Pega

VP 72D	500-480		2 cubic (Nr. 9): 1-3, vorne 4, oben 5; vorne 5, oben 4, Seite 2 (Punkt-Kreis)	
VP 483	early 5 <sup>th</sup>	22 pebbles		
VP 41D	490-80		2 oblong	1
VP 212B	450	17 pebbles 5 cowries	2 oblong: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6	1
VP 4	c450	2 blue spiral dec.	1 cubic 1-6, 2-5, 3-4	
VP 18C	450-30	11 cowries 14 counters	2 oblong: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6 (3-6 on the large faces)	2
VP 28D	450-400	4 pebbles: 2 white, 2 grey		
VP 11C	420		1 oblong: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6	
VP 136A	350 end 5 <sup>th</sup> / early 4 <sup>th</sup>		3 cubic: 1-6, 2-5, 3-4	1 big, 1 small
VP 134D	330-280	13 glass counters in diff. colours	3 cubic: 1-6, 2-5, 3-4	

### Bologna, Arnoaldi (550-350 BC)

A80	end 6 <sup>th</sup>	3x5 (blue, green, yellow), 1x6 (white) glass	3 cubic bone	
A78	460-50	7 pebbles		
A118	c450	3 glass: 2 white, 1 blue	1 rect. flat: 1-2, 3-4, ?-6	
A119	c450?		1 rect. 1-2, 3-4, 5-6; 1 circle on both small faces.	
A132	c450	6 dotted, 6 white, 6 green	3 rect. 3-4, ?-6; 1 circle on both small faces.	
A147	c450	1 pebble		
A88	c450-40	6 blue, 1 dark blue, glass orig. 24 or 18 counters	3: 3-4, 5-6, 1-1 (!) or 1-2 missing	
A151	450-40		1 rect. flat: 1-2, 3-4, ?-6	
A128 1885/4	c450-25	6 with orange dots/stripes, 6 blue, 6 turquoise, 6 white	2 rect. flat. 1-2, 3-4, 5-6	1
A60	450-25?	6 white pebbles		
A110	450-25	2x5, 1x6 white limestone and granite		
A114	450-25	19 pebbles: 7 white, 6 brown, 3 rose, 3 grey-green	3 rect. flat 1-2, 3-4, 5-6 (n° 5 on 3 <sup>rd</sup> die)	
A109	450-400		1 oblong: points on 3 faces	
A127 1885/1	425-20		2 rect. flat. + 1 fragm.: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6)	
A121	c420	5 dotted blue-turquoise, 3 blue, 3 turquoise	1	1
A58	375-50		1 cubic, bone 1-6, 2-5, 3-4	
A150			2 rect. flat: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6; 1-2, 3-4, ?-6	
A21	end 5 <sup>th</sup> / early 4 <sup>th</sup> c.	1 big pebble, 3 little pebbles		

**Bologna, Certosa (Zannoni, Scavi della Certosa)  
End 6th / early 4th century BCE**

Cert.27	end 6th / early 5th c.	12 pebbles		
Cert.317	525-475	3 glass spiral decoration.	2 oblong stand. 1 cubic standard	
Cert.3	early 5th c.	18 pebbles		
Cert.7	early 5th c.?	24 pebbles (4x6?)	2 cubic 1-2, 3-4, 5-6!	
Cert.337	500-450, perhaps early 5th c.	19 glass	1 cubic standard	
Cert.151	475-450	24 pebbles (4x6)	2 etr. 1-2, 3-4, 5-6	
Cert.318	475-50	15 (16) pebbles		
Cert.110	475-50	7 pebbles, 4 cowries in line	2 cubic: blank-2, 3-4, 5-6	1
Cert.108	c460	9 glass: 5 yellowish, 5 blueish	2 oblong	
Cert.89	450-00	9	2 etr. 1-2, 3-4, 5-6	
Cert.66	400-350	2 glass: 1 yellow, 1 blue	1 oblong, bone, double circles; 1-2, 3-4, 5-6	
Cert.19		6 pebbles		
Cert.385		5 pebbles 5 glass	2 cubic standard	
Cert.389		6 glass	2 cubic standard	
Cert.392		24 pebbles: different shapes and colours		
Cert.417		8 bone discs ornam.		

**Bologna elsewhere**

De Luca 9	475-50	7 limestone	3 oblong standard	
De Luca 15	460-50		2 etr.: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6	
De Luca 110	c420-10	15 (16) glass, 4 of which with inserted dotted decoration	3 etr: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6; one has erroneously 1-2, 4-, 5-6	
Ars 1			2 oblong 1 cubic (NotScavi 1886, p. 67sq.)	
Ars 4	c450	6 green, 6 white, 5 turquoise, 9 blue	2 oblong (NotScavi 1886, p. 72sq.)	
Ars 6		6 white, 6 turkish, 6 turquoise with white dots	3 oblong: 1-1, 3-4, blank-6 (NotScavi 1886, p. 74)	
Aureli 6	c465	12 pebbles	1	
Via dei Mille	450-25	3	2	
Ceretolo 1877/1	375-350 Vitali: 1 <sup>st</sup> qu. 4 <sup>th</sup> c.	17 limestone "rosato e chiaro"		
Benacci 953	early 3 <sup>rd</sup> c.	22 limestone	3 cubic standard (only 1 with all the faces preserved)	
Benacci Caprara 1	early 3 <sup>rd</sup> c.	8 limestone (NotScavi 1889, p. 294: 9)		
GM 9	end 6 <sup>th</sup> c.	6	3 (NotScavi 1889, p. 207sq.)	

GM sgabello	end 6 <sup>th</sup> / early 5 <sup>th</sup> c.	14 (15?) with dots (NotScavi 1887, p. 341sq.: 20)		
GM 17	end 6 <sup>th</sup> / early 5 <sup>th</sup> c.	14 various (NotScavi 1889, p. 210: 10)		
GM 14?	5 <sup>th</sup> c.	x glass	2 (NotScavi 1876, p. 181)	
GM 2		x glass (NotScavi 1876, p. 51)		
GM			2 (NotScavi 1876, p. 82)	
GM 6			1, ivory (NotScavi 1889, p. 182)	
GM 19		5	3	
GM grande	after 450	14: 3 dark green, 6 dark green with a dot, 5 dark green with a line	3 rect. flat fragmented	
Battistini 11	450-400	4 glass	1	
Battistini			12: 4 flat, 3 oblong, 5 cubic	
?			8 or 9: 1 flat, 5 oblong. 2-3 cubic	

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