3. ANCIENT BOARD GAMES AS ANTHROPOGRAMS

As we have seen, in traditional cosmological symbolism, structural correlation and parallelism in all things and in particular between the universe and man is a basic notion. Everything that we say about the community, the city or the cosmos, is at the same time speaking about man himself. Therefore, *mandalas* can (and must) be seen not only as cosmological images but also as physio-psychograms, images of man, and anthropograms. This means that they refer to one's body but also to one's psyche in the widest and most transcendental sense available. Therefore, symbols that are apparently referred to organization at a macrocosmic level are in fact also stressing the microcosmical level that man at both his physical and spiritual levels represents. As in the Hindu tradition, not only is the body analogous to the universe, in its physical extent and divisions, but it also contains within itself all the Gods (TUCCI, G. 2001: 108).

Therefore, these two points of view, macrocosmic and microcosmic, happen at the same time and allow us to understand hidden aspects of the other. As Plato explains: "suppose a short-sighted person had been asked by some one to read small letters from a distance; and it occurred to someone else that they might be found in another place which was larger and in which the letters were larger --if they were the same and he could read the larger letters first, and then proceed to the lesser […] I propose therefore that we enquire into the nature of justice and injustice, first as they appear in the State, and secondly in the individual, proceeding from the greater to the lesser and comparing them." (REP. II 10, 368D-369A).

We propose the same thing: having studied the cosmological implications of board games, let us go on to study their personal, psychological and spiritual

implications. In fact, as we have seen, as we get deeper into the symbology of board games, it starts to transcend the cosmos itself and get nearer to man. The further away we go in developing the idea of center, cardinality, limits or cycles the easier it is to end up talking not about the cosmos as an outer abstract being but about the concrete human, each of us. Everything we have already said about centrality, cardinality, limits and cycles of temples, cities and the whole cosmos will be found again when looking towards ourselves. Moreover, this wider vision would let us study all the metagaming elements present in board games (the players, the process of play itself, the rules, etc.) which did not fit into the geometrical research conducted until now.

So then, what we will do in this chapter is study the key anthropological implications of the gaming elements essential to board games, beyond the physical board or the pieces themselves. This will complete the research above which was based on primal geometry with deeper symbolic relationships. For that reason, we shift the weight of our research in the following chapters from primal geometry to the essential questions about human life. As we have seen throughout the last chapter, boards can be seen as symbolic representations of the cosmos. Now we see that in fact, they are also representations of the "inner cosmos", all the different "parts" of the human being, especially those related to transcendence.

We have explained above how board games give shape to a ritual or sacred space. In the playing space something different from reality happens: a meaningful activity, intellectually different from hunting or sowing. The playing space, the board, becomes a sacred space with special rules. Therefore, if the board is a sacred space, playing a game can be seen as a rite, the actualization of a myth. Therefore, the vehicular idea behind this chapter is to further develop the sacred symbol/myth/rite triad that forms the basis of

ancient spiritual traditions (OLIVES, J. 2006: 28). If the correspondence between board games and ancient cosmology works at a symbolic level, it is easy to see that this analogy can be applied to the other two aspects of sacred tradition: myths and rites.

3.1 Play and myth

For many years, myths have been rejected as a true way of explaining anything about man, as opposed to history and science. However, this vision comes from a very limited understanding of what myths are. In fact, "the opposite of history is not myth. The opposite of history is forgetfulness." (OLSON, A. 1980: 6). Myths are an amazingly huge repository of knowledge. But myths have not seemed to be interesting, because the symbolic language used in them was mainly forgotten and rejected by the scientific world. This is because the interesting and meaningful ideas contained in myths do not connect with our logical understanding but rather our need for a deeper intuitive interpretation. As Erik Fromm points out: "*En tout cas, nous sentons bien que, ignorés, méprisés ou respectés, les mythes appartiennent à un monde totalement étranger à notre pensé logique*" (FROMM, E. 1989: 9-10).

The rationalistic viewpoint on myths only allows two possible interpretations: either myths have to be taken literally as idealized historical events or they have to be seen as naïve pre-scientific explanations of history and the natural world. The "historicist" possibility reduces the myth to an idealization, exaggeration or elaboration about a concrete historical fact that the established power wanted their subjects to believe. The "scientific" interpretation situates myth before the change from superstitious ignorance to modern science. Myths (mainly cosmogonic myths) are seen as superstitious explanations of

natural phenomena that ancient people used to explain the world and were abandoned as soon as a scientific explanation was given.

In the last century, due to the research in traditional studies, compared religions and symbolism, conducted by S. Freud and C. Jung[51], the general opinion against the value of myths and dreams has improved. In recovering interest in the deep and true meaning of myths, they did the great job of *"rectificar la actitud unilateral de esos hombres modernos que mantienen que esos símbolos pertenecen a los pueblos de la antigüedad o las 'atrasadas' tribus modernas, y, por tanto, carecen de la importancia para las complejidades de la vida moderna."* (JUNG, C. 1997: 106). This change of mind helped to point out that even though in ancient times some philosophical tendencies (like Sophism) separated "myth" from "reason", this didn't always mean disregarding the former as nonsense. They always admitted that the mythical narration was the perfect way of explaining philosophical truths. Even though he criticized poets and poetical narration, Plato took this same idea when he used myths as a method to explain certain truths that couldnt be understood with pure rational reasoning (FERRATER, J. 1970: 283).

However, if we take what we have seen about traditional cosmological symbolism, there is a third way of understanding myths that not only completes but also consistently explains their meaning. Myths must be understood as narrations of episodes that happen in a special "out of everything" space and time, *in illo tempore*. They refer to archetypal human nature, and therefore they are narrations of truth, *vera narratio*. A myth is not fiction, illusion or lie, but a symbolic expression of the real world. It is a sacred tale that explains religious and philosophical ideas through examples. Man in

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[51] With E. Cassirer, M. Eliade, L. Strauss, A. Coomaraswamy, J. Olives and many others.

antiquity did not separate their daily activities from their beliefs (LHÔTE, JM. 1994: 72). Therefore, all narratives about legendary heroes and kings and their deeds are directly connected to the person that is telling and hearing them. As Olives explains: *"Todo eso podría tomarse como mera superstición si no hiciéramos el esfuerzo de recordar el valor que tienen los símbolos en la mentalidad arcaica y primitiva."* (OLIVES, J. 2006: 41). The mythical time is not a remote past but a perennial present, connected at a very deep level to both narrator and public. All myths are based and told in symbolic language, in which feelings, internal experiences and thoughts are seen and explained as if they were external. In seeing them develop outside, as heroes, gods and monsters, we are led to find out more about, and maybe even to understand, our inner cosmos.

For this reason, myths and legends had a great influence on our ancestors, directly affecting their daily lives and decisions. As an example, the Regional inspector Tao Kan (259-334 AD) threw into the Yangtze all Weiqi and Sugoroku boards in his jurisdiction. The Weiqi boards were thrown away because of the legend about its origin. The legend explained how it was invented by Emperor Shun for instructing his fool son (FAIRBAIRN, J. in FINKEL, I. 2006: 133). Therefore, Tao Kan decided that nobody in his region would be fool, and therefore nobody would play Weiqi, destroying every board. Tao Kan also destroyed the Sugoroku boards because of a legend. As there was a legend saying how the cruel tyrant Zhou invented Sugoroku, the mere existence of the game could perpetuate his foul memory.

We can see that all the energy, interest and speculative and theoretical capacity invested by modern western man in science and technique was dedicated to myth and legend by ancient cultures (CIRLOT, JE. 1991: 16). As mythical consciousness is one of the concrete manifestations of full human consciousness, studying myths sheds some light onto the latter (FERRATER, J.

1970: 284). In this way, myths are also a way to understand ancient cultures from within, and in doing this, understand our own cultural roots.

Telling a myth is to proclaim what happened *ab initio* (ELIADE, M. 1998: 72). Greeks used a special verbal tense called *αόριστος* (invisible, indefinable) when telling myths and epic poems. This tense automatically situated the public in an "As if…" mood, essential to understand this kind of narrative[52]. The *aoristos* verbal tense has the same function in suspending reality as the rules in board games. When playing, as we have seen, normal time and rules cease to apply to players. Sitting round a board and moving the pieces on it suspends reality in the same way that the *aoristos* verbal tense does. It is a willing suspension, and in case of need or danger, could be immediately abolished. However, during this span of time the players connect with the mythical time when the rules of the game were set. Explaining the rules is telling the myth again, and their actualization (actually playing the game) transforms the players into the heroes of the adventure. The analogical relationship between myths and board games works at this ontological level.

As the game develops and rules are actualized, it is in fact happening following the model rules set in mythical time. This keeps the rules in a perennial present at the same time that gives them authority, as we will see below.

3.1.1 The heroic challenge

The overcoming of great challenges is the main trait of the heroic myths. The myth begins with a challenging situation that threatens the hero himself or the whole of creation and ends with a stable situation that resolves the challenge.

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[52] We can still find this kind of stylistic rhetoric in the formula "Once upon a time…".

This basic narrative structure, from challenge to fixed result can be traced in every mythical tradition (DUCH, L. 1998: 180).

At the same time, this same structure can be symbolically applied to board games. Games, as opposed to childish casual play, are inconceivable without a more or less fixed set of rules. These rules are incomplete if they do not have a goal: that is, what players are aiming to achieve (reach somewhere, kill a piece, empty the board, fill the board, etc.). That goal, whichever it is, must present some kind of difficulty or challenge to all players. Without that difficulty, that "something not trivial" to achieve, there is no game. In fact, if we knew how the game ended at the start, we would not be playing a game at all, but performing a theatrical play. So then, one of the basic premises of games is that the outcome is unknown. That uncertainty is what moves a player to play, what makes playing a game interesting and fun. That is, we see the game as a challenge. This key word, "challenge", comes to English from the Latin *calumnia*. In the middle ages, a challenge was still an accusation against honour, a legal dispute. From that sense, it evolved to the meaning it has today: "a call to fight", to oppose or be opposed in some activity. In games this is the common meaning, what we understand as challenge: the element that prevents us from obtaining what we want (the goal) in a ludic way.

Achieving the goals in a game is symbolically analogous to an image of life, an initiation journey full of obstacles that the hero must overcome. The journey of the hero is a metaphor for individual spiritual development. This universal archetypal figure, the hero, is the best-known and most common myth around the world (JUNG, C. 1997: 110). When the hero achieves its goal, overcoming all difficulties, he usually dies. This symbolic death of the hero is at the same time his liberation, his ascension to higher levels of consciousness and being (JUNG, C. 1997: 112).

Following the same principle, games, and especially board games can be seen as symbolizing a transcendence environment, taking the form of a "difficult passage", the though journey. The player, as hero or a aspiring initiate, must overcome the difficulties of this challenge in order to become who he is, or to be considered part of the community (that is, to win). As Eliade explains: *"El héroe de un cuento de iniciación debe pasar por 'donde se encuentran la noche y el día', o hallar una puerta en un muro que no ofrece ninguna, o subir al Cielo por un pasaje que no se abre más que un instante, pasar entre dos muelas en movimiento continuo, entre dos rocas que se tocan en todo momento e incluso entre las mandíbulas de un monstruo, etc. Todas estas imágenes místicas expresan la necesidad de trascender los contrarios, de abolir la polaridad que caracteriza la condición humana para acceder a la realidad última"* (ELÍADE, M. 1974: 91). The challenge that a game presents is symbolically analogous to the mythical idea of the though journey, so all the playing environment becomes a test of wit and intelligence. The games perform as rites of passage, or ordeal, as well as a reiteration of the cosmogony, the reestablishment of the cosmos out of chaos (ELIADE, M. 1987: 471).

This relationship becomes intuitively clear if we think about those board games based on paths, where the goal is to reach a specific square. The movement of the pawn (or pawns) across the board is analogically and metaphorically related to the passing of man (the player, but everyman too) through life, with the successful playing and ending of the game being his spiritual ascension or illumination (ELIADE, M. 2003: 131–133). This vital voyage is the story of an individual that leaves his home and family, and embarks on an adventure. After overcoming great difficulties and performing onerous deeds he finally returns triumphant to his home. The effort of conquering the truth about the world and oneself appears symbolically in myths as combats with mythical beasts or seemingly never-ending tasks. This heroic voyage is

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interpreted as a metaphor of the individual spiritual process, and the physical and mental deeds carried out by the hero in the spiritual effort of self-improvement (LEIGH, B. 2002: 38-39). This mythological figure is even clearer when we talk about a ritual search, called *queste* in the Arthurian legends (the origin of the word *quest*). The effort in conquering the truth and reaching the spiritual center, "oneself", is represented in symbols and myths by hard work, fights, endeavors, etc. Monsters and other natural difficulties analogically represent the instinctive powers of man that chain him and pull him "down", keeping him from achieving happiness (CIRLOT, JE. 1991: 45). The incidences and situations of the pieces in the game are analogous to the mythical adventures of a traveler on his journey. It is the player's experience of mythical reality through the playing pieces (FARGAS, A. 1997: 16).

Even though there were other kinds of games, those based on paths were the most common kind of ancient board game. According to Lhôte this could be a metaphorical embodiment of the awareness of our ephemeral existence in this world. In other words, as life and death had such a great weight in the beliefs of ancient civilizations it is easy to understand how the passing of man through life was the symbolic basis of a huge amount of ancient board games (LHÔTE JM. 1994: 129). This applies to Mehen and Senet explicity, but also to Twenty Squares, Fifty-eight Holes, Thaayam, Ashta-Kaste, Siga, Moksha-Patamu and Pachisi. We could say that in Pachisi the pieces move round the world analogically, following a circular path in trying to reach the center. This objective, "reaching the center", can be seen as the final liberation of the soul and of the space-temporal limitations of man (ELIADE, M. 1987: 470). Their movement is dictated both by the throwing of dice (or another random generating implement, acting as the will of God) and by the will of the player, who decides which piece moves each time. The four-sided dice used in some

Indian versions have been related to the four ages of man (*Yugas*) (BIARDEAU, M. 1981: 157).

In games like Shogi, or Chaturanga we can see a similar analogy. As we have seen, we can relate the board analogically to the world and so we can relate it to human beings, through the macrocosm-microcosm analogy. The individual pieces symbolize parts (in a psychological or spiritual sense) or features of man, as well as functions in society or forces in the world (LHÔTE, JM. 1996: 116-117). Hindu tradition explicitly related the different pieces of Chaturanga to the qualities of the ruler. This was identified with the center of the eight-radius wheel, the "engine" of the world which makes it move and advance. There is a complete parallelism between the king and the cosmic axis, because he draws his power from the gods, and so becomes the living center of the universe. The parallelism between the movements in all eight directions of the "king" or "emperor" piece in games like Chaturanga, Shogi or Xianqi is an analogy of the idea of the living center. The image of the "king" represents the immortal soul of the raja, which can go anywhere (i.e. move in any direction. The horse is the mental quickness of the governor, and his nobility (COOPER, JC. 2000: 35-36). The elephant is the "ego" of the raja, his capacity to reign with power, but at the same time is one of the forms of Shiva, and so represents his knowledge, memory and wisdom. In the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ,* the ship is the symbol of the Ship of Knowledge, and in Buddhism, Buddha is sometimes referred to as the Great Sailor. Therefore, the game is not the reenactment of a war or a real confrontation, but rather a complex form of ritual. In fact, it is still played as a meditation ritual in the Buddhist Full Moon holy days and during weddings (BIEDERMANN, H. 2000: 253).

Therefore, if we take a look at the gaming environment, there is a clear analogy between heroic foundational myths and the setting of gaming rules.

The hero in his civilizing role sets new rules and gives new abilities to his people. By performing a civilizing act, founding the city or teaching how to sow, the hero establishes a foundational act, which would be ritualized, repeated and remembered by the community (OLIVES, J. 2006: 63). Therefore, the hero is also a founder, and known as *οικίστες* in the case of the ancient foundation of cities. The founder of the city is also the law-giver, as we will see. This fact is analogically applicable to the rules of games. The hero, the creator of the game, embeds in it his knowledge and civilizing intentions. In order to do so, he establishes a set of rules both for setting up the game and for playing it. Native American traditions are full of myths and legends that reveal the sacred significance of gambling and the divine origin, power and symbolism of games. The Navajo call these myths "legends of games", and they talk about both the mythical origin of games and their rules (GABRIEL, K. 1996: 17).

However, the most famous legend about board games is probably that of the origins of Chess, whose protagonist is the son of the Brahman Dahir. This half-real, half-mythical character is known by probably as many names (Sissa, Sessa, Lahur Sessa, Caïssa…), as there are variants of the legend (CARDONA, F. 2000: 13). These variations of the legend, while differing in the details, repeat the same basic schema: a king, a *kshatriya*, has a problem; Sissa, a wise *brahman*, creates the game to teach a lesson. In this way, the wise man teaches the Good Way to the king through a game. Then, after the problem has apparently been solved, Sissa asks for an impossible payment, through his mathematical prowess, giving a second lesson in humility to the king.

The most widespread version tells the story of the king Shirdam (at the beginning of the 5th century) who had become lazy and blind with pride because of his flatterers. He believed himself invincible, and he ruled the land

without any wisdom. Sissa decided to open his eyes by teaching him a lesson in humility he could not forget. The legend relates how Sissa invented Chess to teach the king that he alone could not do anything to save the land, and he depended on his subjects to reign properly (CARDONA, F. 2000: 9-10). When the king recognized his failure, he wanted to reward Sissa in whichever way he asked. He asked for a grain of wheat on the first square of the board, two on the second, four on the third… and so on up to the end of the board. The king accepted without thinking, but when the counsellors started counting, they found that the cipher that Sissa was asking for was 18,446,744,073,709,551,615 wheat grains[53], an impossible quantity to amass even nowadays over thousands of years of production.

In another version, the Hindu monarch is called Kaid. The legend says that he had beaten all his enemies thanks to his consummate military tactics. Having finished with fighting, the country was happy and living in peace but king Kaid was getting more and more bored. This boredom dragged the King into permanent sadness, and a growing death wish. Sissa brought a game where he could practise the art of war, with all its tactics and maths involved. Then Sissa asked for the huge amount of wheat (CARDONA, F. 2000: 10-11).

A further version of the legend reconts the sadness of king Ladava in India. After the death of his son Ajamir, killed by Varanguil the barbarian, he became obsessed with the battle that led to his son's demise. He desperately tried to think about what had gone wrong during the battle and what could have been done to save his son. Sissa came to the court with the game of Chess to teach Ladava that also sometimes in the same way, a piece has to be sacrified to win the game, sacrifices have to be made in order to reign over a country. Without

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[53] This is the result of the addition $2^0+2^1+2^2+2^3+…+2^{62}+2^{63}$ which demonstrates the huge mathematical prowess of Sissa.

a prince, the country would suffer; without a King, the country would die. For this lesson Sissa demanded his wheat payment (CARDONA, F. 2000: 11-13).

As we see, these three versions of the same legend have many elements in common. In the first place, the creation of the game is attributed to a single person from the priest caste. Secondly, with the game this priest teaches a vital lesson to the king, which saves the country. In the third place, he always asks for an impossible payment with a cunning heroic deed, as proof of his intelligence and mathematical prowess. The powerful king (the image of the triumphant hero) is amazed (and therefore annihilated) by superior wisdom, as a way of telling the "death" of the once victorious hero.

With regard to Chess, there is another legend concerning not with the origins of the game but rather its journey from India to Persia (CARDONA, F. 2000: 14-17). The Arab poet Fidoursi, in around the 10th century, in his Book of Kings, mentioned one relating Chess to the origins of Backgammon. The legend says that a Hindu raja, a vassal of Emperor Cosroes of Persia, sent the emperor an ambassador loaded with presents (including a Chess board with its pieces) and a letter. In the letter, Cosroes was challenged to work at before the end of the week how the strange game was played. If he was unable to do so, the Hindu raja would be freed from paying any tribute, and Persia would loose its hegemony over India. The wise men in Cosroes' court tried to decipher the game for six days and nights, without having a clue how the game was played. Finally, his first minister Wuzurg-Mihr (sometimes-spelled Buzurjmihr) was able to do so in just one day and one night, keeping the honor and supremacy of Persia over India[54]. This legend does not stop here, but is continued with

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[54] Some authors intend to see in this information two things that should be pointed out. First of all, the Indian origin of Chess, and in second place the demonstration that Chess was already been played in the Persian form in the 6th century, when Cosroes reigned. As for the first assumption, we have to

another deed of wisdom by Wuzurg-Mihr (CHEVALIER, J. 1999: 393-394). Once the Persian wise man finds how Chess works, he challenges the Indian court with a similar task. To doing so, he created Backgammon and presented it to the Indian raja. The wise men of the Indian court were unable to work out how to play the game, thereby acknowledging the supremacy of Persia. Afterwards, the Persian king asked Wuzurg-Mihr to explain the game. He answered by explaining all the symbolism he had embedded in the game and his description of what he had devised is quoted here following Christopher Brunner's translation: "Wuzurg-Mihr said: 'Of the rulers during this millennium, Ardashir was the most effective and wise; I will name the game Noble-(is)-Ardashir [*new-ardashir* contracted to *nard*] in Ardashir's name. I will make the board of Noble-(is)-Ardashir like Spandarmad, the Earth. I will make thirty counters like the thirty *nycthemera* [nights and days]; I will make fifteen white like day and fifteen black like night." (FIDOURSI as in MCKENZIE, C. & FINKEL, I. 2004: 89)

After this, he continued describing the symbolism of the die, assigning cosmic and religious references to each face: "I will make a single die, like the revolutions of the constellations and the turning of the zodiac. I will make a 'one' on the die, just as Ohrmazd is one; all well-being was created by him. I will make a 'two', just like the material existence and the invisible. I will make a 'three', just like good thought, good speech, good works and thought, words, deeds. I will make a 'four' like the four material elements of which a person [consists] and the world's four directions – east west, south and north. I will make a 'five', like the five light-sources – sun, moon, stars, fire and the lightning that comes from the sky. I will make a 'six', like the creating of

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note that in the time of Fidoursi any original or strange invention of unknown origin was attributed to India. As for the second one, Fidoursi wrote this text four hundred years after the facts he describes, so he would most probably adapt the names of the pieces to those known for his contemporaries.

creatures during the six periods of the year-divisions." (FIDOURSI as in MCKENZIE, C. & FINKEL, I. 2004: 89)

Finally, he talks about the rules of the game: "I will make an arrangement of Noble-(is)-Ardashir upon the board just like the lord Ohrmazd, when he created the creatures in the world. The revolving and turning of the counters according to the die is just like people in the world: their bond has been tied to the invisible beings; they revolve and move according to the seven [planets] and twelve [zodiacal sings]. When they hit one [counter] against another and collect [the latter], it is just as people in the world smite one another. When, by the turn of the die, they collect all [the counters], it is an analogy to people, who will come alive again at the resurrection" (FIDOURSI as in MCKENZIE, C. & FINKEL, I. 2004: 89).

Even though some of the symbolic correlations pointed out by Wuzurg-Mihr seem a bit artificial or out of place, the intention to relate the board, the gaming implements and the rules to religion and traditional cosmogony is clear. The man-world-cosmos analogy appears again, relating human life to celestial cycles and the life and death of man to the change and movement of the cosmos. The hero is the one able to reconnect man with the cosmos, remembering the Truth in our daily lives. Here he does it through a game, creating it as an image of Heaven and setting analogical rules, which are to be remembered by the players and in doing so they ritually re-enact and recall the traditional knowledge.

We can find another good example of the civilizing hero related to games in the figure of Palamedes. This son of Nauplius is one of the tragic figures in the mythical history of board games. Although ignored by Homer, he appears in Apolodorus and Pausanias as the "sage that always has a bad end" (CLÚA,

J.A, 1985: 92). Tradition attributes Palamedes with great intelligence and inventiveness. He is the legendary inventor of some letters of the Greek alphabet, like the "Y"; invented when he saw some birds flying in formation. He also "invented" the numbers, weights and measures, coins, the calendar, military formation and how to play music. Palamedes is also related to games, and is said to have invented cubic dice ($\kappa\upsilon\beta o\iota$), how to play with astragals, and the game Petteia (CARDONA, F. 2000: 33), which he invented to entertain the Greek soldiers during the siege of Troy. Clúa points out that Palamedes might be the personification of the change in the 5th century witnessed by Plato and other Greek sages. The passing from a mostly oral civilization to a written one, and the appearance of the sophists, would have caused both a cultural revolution and a shock (CLÚA, J.A, 1985: 86).

It is easy to see that the hero Palamedes overlaps with the Greek god Hermes (and with the Egyptian god Thoth) in many ways (FALKNER, E 1961: 15). In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates says that the god Thoth himself invented Petteia. In Socrates' words: "I heard, then, that at Naucratis, in Egypt, was one of the ancient gods of that country, the one whose sacred bird is called the ibis, and the name of the god himself was *Theuth*. He invented numbers and arithmetic and geometry and astronomy, also board games ($\pi\varepsilon\tau\tau\varepsilon i\alpha\varsigma$) and dice ($\kappa\upsilon\beta\varepsilon i\alpha\varsigma$), and, most important of all, letters" (PLATO, PHAEDRUS 274D). We have to remember that this god represents the collected priestly wisdom of Ancient Egypt (GUÉNON, R. 1984: 260). Here we see again how board games participate in the sacredness of the other ancient activities related to word play (such as theatre or music).

Palamedes also represents the legendary hero that brings culture to men but in return, by twists of fate, is punished by them. His wisdom is his gift and his curse. Ulysses, as a vengeance, punishes Palamedes for discovering that he was

feigning mad to avoid the Trojan War. His fate was tragic, when Ulysses forged evidence to charge him with treason and had him executed. Even Plato in his Apology cites Palamedes as one of those who were unjustly condemned (CARDONA, F. 2000: 33).

3.1.2 Ethics, rules and cheating

As we see, the hero sometimes appears as the bringer of culture and therefore the one who establishes rules or customs. As every myth is a precedent and an example, the hero's actions become the cultural and moral beacon to follow (ELIADE, M. 1997: 372). So then, if we have seen that heroes are sometimes related to games we can explore the regulating aspect of heroes in this field. To do so, we need to analyze the symbolic implications of the concept of gaming rules itself.

As we enter the field of game rules, we easily slip into the field of ethics. If, as we have seen, play is a fundamental human activity, it must also impinge on how we make choices and how we give value to things through our choices. The ethics of play offer an alternative to the dichotomies that have preoccupied modern man for so long and suggest a new direction for our thought which is neither relativistic, objective nor static. The ethical aspect of play shows that, far from being a peripheral activity, it is one of the most essential categories we constantly turn to without knowing it (HANS, J.S. 1981: XII-XIII).

Board games can be seen as analogical models of reality, as we have shown above. As ethics are an essential part of human anthropology, we can automatically see an analogical relationship between these two fields in game rules. Games, as we have seen, differ from other kinds of play activities because of their fixed rules. In that sense, games tend to substitute the anarchy

of human relationships with a new and simplified order. These substitutive order and rules reflect and simplify those of the world. In that sense, we can say that through game we change from an "animal" domain to a cultural domain, from instinctive to human (FARGAS, A. 1997: 21).

One of the elements that makes rules fall within human domain is the spoken (or written) word. Rules were told and explained orally from player to player and seldom written[55]. Even when written, fixed rules exist, "house rules" are set orally before each game. The fact is that these words give shape to the reality of the board game. As we have seen, in traditional symbolism the spoken word is the giver of life and of reality (REVILLA, F. 2007: 119). At the same time that it can be used to separate and name places and people, it can be used to shape and change reality. With each new rule spoken and shared between players, reality changes and becomes that of the board game. When a aspiring initiate achieves a higher rank, a new name is given to him to represent the "death" of the old being and the "rebirth" of the new one (REVILLA, F. 2007: 121). In the same way, when the rules of the game are spoken, the "old" reality becomes suspended, temporally forgotten. Then, the "new" reality of the game comes to life, replacing the old one.

Game rules limit and allow the game at the same time. As we have seen above, even though rules are a limitation of possibilities, forcing players to do this and not that, this limitation is what makes a game what it is. In fact, as we have seen, we only can say that we are playing a game when we follow its rules: that is, if we change the rules we would be playing a different game. By definition,

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[55] Nowadays it may seem that only rules to traditional board games are taught orally. In fact, even though commercially produced games have extensive written rules, players prefer to be taught by an experienced player rather than read and interpret the rules themselves. That sometimes provokes the distortion of the original rules, into "house rules". In some cases, as in some documented Monopoly games, those "house rules" differ so much from the original ones they are unrecognizable.

a board game is its rules. Therefore, board games fit perfectly into the ethical-legal discussion.

When speaking about following the rules of a game correctly, we can see that playing properly requires a judge. Judges punish the faults committed by players, but do not cheer their victories. They have a dissuasive role, encouraging players to play "by the rules" or be punished. At the same time, they have to know the rules of the game by heart in order to clarify and resolve possible disputes. Therefore, the judge is the guardian of the rules and order. His function is somewhat different depending on the factors that are open to "cheating" in a given game. While in the pure strategical board games the judge is just watching the players following the rules, in games where there is some sort of randomness he is also trying to make it fair for all participants. As the guardian of law and order, the judge becomes a central element of the game, and he is conveniently situated in a place of honor, where he can clearly see the board. These "places of honor" are chosen following the key central spaces and determine the orientation of the board. LHÔTE, JM. 1976: 46-47).

In present-day competitions, the judge is always a third person, different from the players, observing the game from outside. However, games are a special kind of activity, where the opposition and collaboration of all participating players flows in a very organic way. The interesting thing is that when playing informally (that is, almost all the time), both players are constantly acting as judges of themselves and their opponents. First, they recognize themselves in a ludic attitude, as willing to play and as opponents in the game. Then both opponents agree on the set of rules they are to follow: they select which game they are going to play. They choose the playing space, pieces and implements by mutual agreement, setting up the limits of what will be "in game" and what "outside the game". Once the game starts, they act as their own referees

because they are constantly remembering the rules of the game and playing according to them. Each player has to teach himself to play properly if he does not want to break the gaming atmosphere and be out of the game. If we assume that the player really wants to play, he has to stick to his word and abide "by the rules", accepting them as his own. At the same time, he observes the movements of the opponent. Has he moved legally? Is he throwing the dice properly? Are his dice loaded? In a conscious or unconscious way, the correct development of the game depends on the judgment of all the intervening players. The interest to avoid cheating is both the desire to win and a desire to continue the game.

There is an obvious relationship between the traditions, ideology and institutions of a certain society and the games played by that collective. Or rather, the social rules underpinning each culture are linked with the games in that society (FARGAS, A. 1997: 22). For that reason, games have an important function: to socialize and give cohesion to human communities, in the widest sense of the word. Shared games create a feeling of belonging, cohesion and unity far beyond the game itself. What maintains this "belonging" through time and beyond the duration of the game is the feeling of sharing an exceptional situation, separated from the outside with different rules. So then, playing a game is to limit oneself and ones actions to a space ruled by a certain set of rules. Players willingly abide by these artificial rules, and play within them most of the time. In any case, as with rules in society, this obedience is not perfect: people can freely try to bend or avoid them. Trying to cheat in games and board games is as old as setting rules, and fits perfectly with the ethical discourse of this chapter. The same ideas that we could find in the "real" world about breaking rules and how this is punished can be found by analogy in board games.

As inclusion is the greatest reward in board games, expulsion is the greatest penalty. We have to remember that games are played mostly for their ludic appeal. The player cheats to reach the goal easily. Therefore, we can conclude that despite cheating, the player still wants to be in the game to be able to "win". If the cheat is caught, the game usually is declared null and void. If turning back is possible, the cheating movement is declared non-existent. In any way, the cheat is always afraid of being banished, cast out of the game. Cheats have the power of breaking the "magic" of the game, thus avoiding any player from achieving victory.

As some extent of cheating is considered normal and even can form part of the game, the figure of the cheat can be related by analogically to that of the Trickster, the cheating spirit, hero or god. This common character of all the Indo-European branches of mythology appears as a civilizer and creator, an essential part of the cosmogony. In different traditions, it is a crow, spider or coyote, and it is their ability to play and cheat that allows them to achieve what they want. This advantage is also their doom because to trick him back men often use the same games (ELIADE, M. 1987: 476). As we see, myths about cheating between gods or between men and gods are very common in ancient traditions. It relates to gambling, because the trick or cheating happens when something extremely important (other than the game itself) is at stake. When gods and men know that their own holiness or humanity is at play, both do anything to win.

In any case, we can assume that the fact of playing has involved a certain degree of cheating since the beginning. Written references about cheating start to multiply in ancient Greece and Rome. The first documented cheating incident happened in the Olympic Games, in the year 388 B.C. The boxer Eupolus from Tessalia bribed three of his opponents so they fell to the floor

during combat. We also know that during the same period some people cheated in gambling with *ἀστράγαλοι*, sheep bone with four possible positions (OXFORD CLASSICAL DICTIONARY, 1970: 133). Greeks also used cubic dice, *κύβοι* and due to the prevalence of cheating, they invented systems to ensure proper throws. We have evidence that hints at the existence of loaded dice (lead weighted dice), called *μεμολυβδωέμνοι*. In many Greek and Roman dice games, the use of a shaker or cup was compulsory. Dice towers with irregular stairs inside were also common, because they assured a cheat-free throw (OXFORD CLASSICAL DICTIONARY, 1970: 338-339). One of the best-preserved pictorial representations of cheating is the one found in the wall of a tavern in Pompeii. Two different scenes portray this tale of cheating and fighting. In them we can see two young men playing Duodecim Scripta, with some words (in a very vulgar Latin) written over their heads. The first scene depicts one of the players shouting *"Exsi"* (I am out), and his opponent answering *"Non tria duas est"* (That's not a three, is a two). In the second scene we see both men fighting while they shout *"Noxsi a me, tria eco fui"* (No, for me, it was a three!) being answered *"Orte fellator, eco fui"* (Look at me, sucker! It was!). Then the tavern owner pushes them out of the tavern with the words *"Itis fora rixsatis"* (Go outside to fight) (TODD, F.A. 1939: 6 and CLARK, J.R. 2003: 167). Even though Fittà (FITTÀ, M. 1997: 118) describes the scene as if they were playing a dice game and not a board game, the expression "exit" (implying movement off a board) applied to the game makes us think about the former possibility.

Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics* describes the moral resemblance between foul governors who sack cities and other kinds of greedy people, such as professional players: "For those who make great gains but from wrong sources, and not the right gains, e.g. despots when they sack cities and spoil temples, we do not call mean but rather wicked, impious, and unjust. But the gamester and the footpad (and the highwayman) belong to the class of the

mean, since they have a sordid love of gain. For it is for gain that both of them ply their craft and endure the disgrace of it, and the one faces the greatest dangers for the sake of the booty, while the other makes gain from his friends, to whom he ought to be giving. Both, then, since they are willing to make gain from wrong sources, are sordid lovers of gain; therefore all such forms of taking are mean." (ETH. NIC. IV – 2, 1122A).

Ammianus Marcellinus, a Roman historian who lived in the last part of the 4th Century A.D. describes how some *aleatores* (a special kind of gamblers) who may have played *Duodecim Scripta*, differed from other players because they had the ability to influence dice and throw whatever they wanted. They had a somewhat "dark" social prestige, mocked by Marcellinus in his 28th book: "Some of these veterans, though few in number, shrink from the name of gamblers (*aleatores*), and therefore desire to be called rather *tesserarii,* persons who differ from each other only insofar as thieves do from brigands." (MARCELLINUS, A., BOOK XXVIII, 4. 21).

Nevertheless, the most harmful person for a game is not the cheat but the person who negates the game itself, not recognizing the rules as such. Even the cheat recognizes and to some extent follows the game's rules, trying to accomplish the goal of the game in dubious ways. The cheat believes and shares the sacredness of the game, knows the rules by heart, but ignores them in trying to take advantage. However, the negator does not accept the idea of a different set of rules applied to reality, thus destroying the magic of the game. There is nothing worse than a person saying "this is nonsense" to two people playing because they know it is true, a game only exists as long as they allow it to exist. The *Spielverderber* (game spoiler), as Huizinga calls it, does not recognize the sacred space that playing needs, and by acting in an inappropriate way he breaks the division between game and reality (HUIZINGA, J. 1958: 24).

Game rules are accepted by convention, but they are transpositions of natural laws or connected to symbolic or unconscious elements. This does not prevent the rules from changing within established limits, shared by all players. These rules, set *in illo tempore*, seem to evolve following a law of increasing complexity (LHÔTE, JM. 1996: 447). When players achieve such degree of mastery with a specific set of rules, that a board game stops posing any challenge to them, they tend to adjust the rules to make it more complicated. One documented case is that of Shatranj Kamil ("Perfect Shatranj", also called Tamerlan Chess), said to have been invented by Tamerlan (Timur Lenk 1336-1406) because the original game was too easy for him to play (MURRAY, HJR. 1913: 204-205). Alfonso X also included more complicated variants of Chess, which were played with many different pieces on bigger boards (ALF. 81R-82V). The most spectacular case is that of Taikyoku-Shogi ("ultimate Shogi", played around 1550 in Japan), with 402 pieces per player, of 208 different types, with a grand total of 253 different kinds of movements (CHESSVARIANTS.ORG, information taken from the book *Sekai no Shogi* by Isao Umebayashi).

3.1.3 Opponent as complementary

The figure of two players sitting face to face with the board between them is the most common vision when thinking about board games and represents very precisely the underlying idea of symmetry and harmony that we will explain in this chapter. The opponent represents the definitive symmetry: the symmetry of challenge. Players do not need the game to be just any challenge, they need it to be a challenge that might not be accomplished: neither too tough, nor too weak. If the challenge is too easy, we always know that we are going to win: there is no point in playing because we know the result. On the other hand, if the challenge is too difficult we are sure that we cannot win, and if we never win, losing all the time keeps us from playing again. Therefore, we

are always searching for ways to adjust the games in order to find the optimal symmetrical challenge. In order to do this we have different strategies, of which we will discuss only two: hidden information and complexity.

It is easy to see that if we always know how the game is going to end, it is not fun. For play to be truly playful there must be something to make each game different, not trivial and not evident. This "replayability" keeps the challenge over time, without making the games too easy to be enjoyable. If all the games were the same, in the end we would reduce the game to just memory and theatre, voiding it of its original sense. Games cease to be games when there is no uncertainty.

By adding hidden information to a game (like chance elements or cards), we cannot flawlessly plan the winning moves from the start, which thereby increases the challenge. Another option to make games challenging is to make them complex. In adding more and more complex rules to a game, we alter the number of decisions that a player has to take. An untrained human mind is not able to manage all the incoming data, and in the end sometimes does not choose the best mathematical option, but the one that is good enough, as far as the player can think. Complexity hides the best move like a needle in a haystack. The final winning move is hidden behind a veil of possibilities. The answer does not come automatically, only after thinking which what the next move should be. The challenge here is to ascertain which the best option is in each and every moment of the game[56].

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[56] Complexity does not have to be reflected just as complex rules. There are many games with simple rules but with a really high level of complexity in which the possibilities are overwhelming (Go or most of the Mancala games). In these games even though the player sees every piece in play, the possibilities of movement and change are so many that the movements are not a trivial issue. Other games, like the Taikyoku-Shogi (where each player has a set of 402 pieces of 208 different types, with a total of 253 different kinds of moves) have both very complex rules and thousands of millions of possibilities of play.

However, in adding hidden information or complexity we are only trying to emulate the challenge that a well-trained human opponent would offer. As humans, we prefer to play together than alone and share the joy of the game. Even if there are many solitaire games, the number of games requiring opponents is far greater because of the challenge and fun provided by the opponent. When we play alone we need to maintain the same challenge, so we need something in place of the figure of the opponent, a hidden gaming mechanism that acts as the will of a hidden adversary.

Liubo players, Han dynasty. Notice the symmetrical disposition of elements in the scene. BRITISH MUSEUM.

We find that without an opponent sometimes there is no game, so the first thing that we notice is that an opponent allows and limits the game at the same time. As Coppin and Marchand explain: *"S'il n'y a pas de partenaire, une partie [...] est non seulement inintéressante, mais elle ne porte même pas de signification"* (COPPIN, F. & MARCHARND, M. 2006: 77). Therefore, the opponent allows you to play (hopefully as a worthy challenger) but on the other hand, with every movement he limits your playing options. Sometimes you can ignore him, but if you want to play properly, the opponent influences and limits what your next movements are. The opponent becomes part of the game, leaving his mark and affecting every decision taken. As Coppin & Marchand point: *"Au Weiqi comme dans la vie, la pensée chinoise a donc tendance à considérer le groupe et l'Autre comme une condition de sa propre existence [...] si le joueur qui a les noirs ne pose pas sa première pierre, blanc n'a aucun intérêt à jouer"* (COPPIN, F. & MARCHAND, M. 2006: 77). While his very existence permits play, the opponent limits your game and of course, the way you enjoy it. Therefore, choosing an opponent is not a trivial issue, because it affects every aspect of the game, even your experience of it. If we believe that the true objective of the game is the game itself, then the choice of the opponent is a key element in playing games, which is often overlooked.

When we talked above about hidden information, we deliberately left the idea open enough to say that the opponent is in fact, almost pure hidden information himself. For a start, you cannot reach into his mind to know what his next movement will be. Even when the pieces are all visible, the strategy that he is going to use is unknown to us. Of course, this works in both directions, because your movements are unknown to your opponent. The worthy opponent becomes the best random implement ever, an intelligence directing the movements of the pieces, an ever-changing puzzle that reacts to our movements. In fact, the game Petteia was used in multiple occasions by

Plato as a favourite image to explain the process of dialectics (GRG. 461D1-3 & REP. 487B1-C3).

Everything works fine if we find an opponent at our level. An easy opponent or one who is too difficult could take most of the fun out of the game. In the first case, we would always win, and the game would become a trivial issue. If on the other hand, we had an opponent that is impossible to beat, we would soon lose interest in the game, because we know that we do not have any chance of winning. Only if we find a worthy opponent does the game become truly enjoyable.

The "problem" with human interaction is that it is not completely rational and cold, but is rather open to mood and subjectivity. We cannot forget that even though opponents are playing together they are, at the same time, playing against each other. They are the good side and the enemy for the other player. However, is our opponent really an enemy? The word enemy implies hostility, ill will, "a wish to harm". Therefore, we have to admit that our opponent is not an enemy, because even if we do not want him to win (because we do want to win) we do not wish him any real harm. Philosophically speaking the opponent is not an enemy, but a complement participant. By opposing two players, in fact, we are opposing two complementary concepts, and from the relationship between them, we grant a final harmony. As Chevalier exemplifies, the opposition between players is like fields in the west and east, opposing clans in the same village, the dry/male and wet/female principles, the Yin and Yang, etc. all of which compose and create the world (CHEVALIER, J. & GHEERBRANT, A. 1999: 612).

The term "adversary" is almost coincident with the idea of opponent. Etymologically it means "he that goes against" or "turned toward one", and it implies the idea of resistance, challenge, an impediment to us winning. If what defines us as a player of a game is that we are not acting for real, once in a game we need to identify ourselves as "player A" and not as "player B", so we need to highlight it somehow. Opposition in board games is represented in many different ways that are symbolically meaningful, and related to the term "adversary". First, there is a basic fact: opponents almost never share the same side of the board. The opponent is playing both with us (sharing the board) and against us (being on the other side of the board).

This idea is part of every board game: in some games, pieces are physically opposed symmetrically on the board; in most board games, each player has his own pieces but in those games where pieces are shared, players own a


Aquiles and Ayax playing in a Greek amphora, ca. 530 BC. VATICAN MUSEUM

territory. As pieces are the instruments of the player on the board, they wear the colours of that player. When we are speaking of two players, these belonging colours usually are black and white, or at least dark and light. The practical, evident reason is that doing so helps in identifying the player's pieces at a glance: these are the most distant colours in the spectrum, easily identifiable and unmistakable.

However, behind all these ideas there is a clear analogy with traditional cosmological symbols such as the Yin-Yang. This image is one of the key elements of oriental as well as Western traditional philosophy: the *coincidentia oppositorum*. Two ideas that seem to be opposed are in fact related to each other as complementary. As we have seen, in traditional cosmological symbolism, there is no sense of dualism, because the opposite of a truth can also be a truth[57] (COPPIN, F. & MARCHARND, M. 2006: 24). Black and white are not watertight and they are always revolving and permeating each other. Concepts such as creation and destruction, order and chaos, active and passive, male and female… cannot be understood alone because they happen simultaneously. In black there is always white, and vice-versa. Both colours are complementary, and are nothing without the other. They do not exist separately but as complementary.

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[57] Real Truth is beyond lesser "truths" that can be said to be opposed to each other.
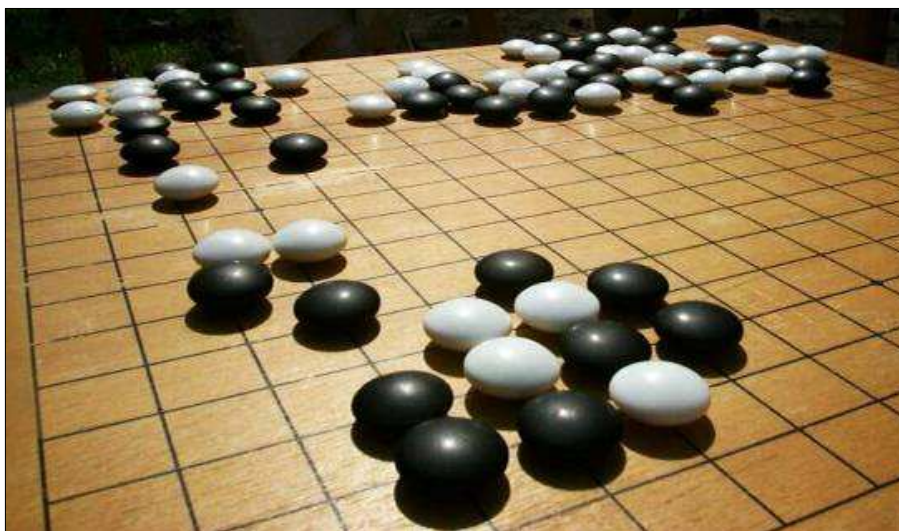
Black and white stones on a Go board. WIKIPEDIA

In games we can directly relate this idea to that of two players playing together and learning from each other. The opponent, the adversary, has to be understood as a reflection of oneself, as a symmetrical image, like a mirror. He is an *alter ego* following the same rules and playing with the same board. Your opponent also has an opponent in you, in the same way as a player has to acknowledge the player at the other side of the board. When we can do so, we give our opponent the same value as we give to ourselves. Both players know the other will do his best to win, so they both find their optimal challenge in each other. Competition becomes cooperation in challenge. The otherness of players dissolves into unity, and both poles (both player and opponent) become one in playing the game. Symmetry in game, harmony (understood as a good, fun, really challenging game) can only be achieved when this complementariness between opponents works. In Chinese philosophical thought, this is very clear: everything in a group must fit together harmoniously (man in society or stones in Weiqi). The individual human being is inconceivable as he cannot be seen as an isolated entity. The word *ren*, is both "man" and "human being", but it is represented with different

characters. The first character (人) represents "man" as an object, in the same way as a table or a chair. The second character (仁) is composed by the radical "man" and the number "two", but the meaning is deeper: "human being", "charity" and "empathy" (COPPIN, F. & MARCHARND, M. 2006: 64). This means that according to Chinese thought, man only becomes a human being by his relationship with others. Bearing this in mind, the figure of the symmetrical opponent becomes even more valuable: it is the condition for game itself, for life itself (COPPIN, F. & MARCHARND, M. 2006: 87).

We would like to expand briefly on the fact that board games in antiquity were designed for either two or four players[58]. In fact, almost all four-player games are based on paths. This is the case of Pachisi, Zohn-ahl and the family of Ashta-kashte. However, we also have to bring into consideration the Chaturanga, which is not. The rest of the games analyzed in this research were for two people to play. Moreover, in four-player games those opposed at the board are usually paired, forming two teams. In Pachisi as in Chaturanga, the players occupying the opposing diagonal positions are considered a team (red with green and yellow with black). In Nyout, two or four players can play, but the number of pieces remains constant. For two players, each one has to take four "horses" but when four people play, only two belong to each player because they are divided equally between the players. Therefore, we can see that in fact, the idea of two opposing forces trying to achieve harmony is compatible with the idea of four players in a game. The figure of the opponent is "divided" into two sub-teams that cooperate to beat the other team. Your partner can act as an opponent sometimes, but he wants you to win as much as himself. The duality of thought that being two represents is analogical to the fact of playing alone. The lone player can be seen as several "egos", thinking

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[58] It seems that in Mehen up to six players could participate (CAZAUX, J-L. 2003: 11-13).

and planning different strategies following an interior dialogue that sometimes decides to act in opposed ways.

3.1.4 Some remarks about the playing pieces

After reading what we have explained above, it would seem that somehow the player is projecting himself onto the game. However, is there some kind of identification? Does he really believe in the pieces as "many himself"? (metaphorically speaking, of course). That is, does the player see in the pieces his "alter ego"? Let us briefly discuss this matter.

The first idea that will shed some light on the matter is the nomenclature of the pieces. Astonishingly, according to the different historical sources consulted, the names given to playing pieces have not changed that much from ancient times. In fact, we can see that in Ancient board games, names given to gaming pieces fall into one of two categories: descriptive names and figurative names.

In the first category, we can catalogue all the purely descriptive names, which offer little symbolical information because they are, in fact, merely what they say they are. This would be the case of names like "seeds", "feces", "cowries", "beans" (as in some Mancala games, WWW.WIKIMANQALA.ORG) or "stones" (Weiqi, Latrunculi…) also called *calculi*, *merelli*, $\pi\epsilon\sigma\sigma\acute{o}\varsigma$ (MURRAY, HJR. 1951: 25). Here the identification of the player with his pieces is impossible, because they are inert objects, completely different from the player. The playing pieces are just, literally, counters. They can be added, subtracted, deleted, harvested, herded, but they are always treated as inert, passive elements.

In the second category, we find the names that we have called "figurative". These names give special qualities or analogical features to playing pieces, not directly inherent to them. In this way, pebbles can be called "dogs" (as in Senet, Latrunculi), "soldiers" (in Chess, Shogi, Xianqi), "horses" (in Nyout, Pachisi), "animals" (Totolospi(II)), etc. In Mancala games, the symbolic meaning depends on the societal background of the game. In societies that are based on fishing, the seeds are called "fish" and in pastoral societies, the counters are considered "cattle". In general, the symbolic meaning is often associated with fertility and prosperity, like seeds and grains (WWW.WIKIMANQALA.ORG).

In this case, playing pieces are symbolically assimilated to serfs, "inferior" or "domestic" beings (dogs, horses, cows, soldiers, slaves, etc.). In fact, nowadays in Spanish we usually refer to the playing pieces as *peones* (literally "pawns"), that is, paid workers. This is a very interesting idea to point out, because the idea of the hierarchy between the pieces and the player pervades. This implies that the player can "command" their pieces to go here or there, stand still or move, and only he is responsible for their actions. All of these names imply the same kind of hierarchy between the player and the pieces: control, dominion. As Groos explains: "[in board games] players appear as leaders of opposing forces and originators of strategic operations" (GROOS, K. 1901: 190). Through the gaming pieces, not the player's ego but his will is projected onto the game. The unity of the will is divided into many as the pawns move across the board. The player is the "chief" that gives them orders, and without whom the pieces alone would not know how to act.

Pawns move in this abstract symbolic space as *alter egos* (note the plural) of the player (LHÔTE, JM, 1994: 94-95). Therefore, we can see that the player-pawn identification is not univocal, but dissolves into multiplicity. In all path games

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(Ur, Fifty-eight Holes, Twenty Squares, Mehen, Senet, Backgammon, Pachisi, etc.) the player does not "own" or is identified with one single piece, but with many. The same happens with Go or Alquerque: the player is identified with a single color, but with multiple pieces. In Mancala games, the dissolution is even bigger: pieces belong to a player only if they are on his side. When a piece is taken out of the game, when it "dies", it can be substituted with another of the same family (color, side…). Pieces "obey" the commands and decisions of their player, but they do not represent him. They are the means through which his decisions affect the board, as soldiers would be in a battle. It is no surprise that in seeing these similarities, the analogy between some board games and war becomes so clear it can be easily mistaken for a copy of reality or a direct representation. The point is that the player is not on the board physically nor in a figurative way. The player is not the king in Hnefatafl, but that piece is, as we explained in the last section, his link with the game[59].

3.1.4.1 Verticality and horizontality

As Champeaux and Sterckx explain, verticality is the essential characteristic of every traditional cosmological symbol referring to man. As the only animal that is able to walk with an upright stance, this peculiar trait is related to the other aspects of humanization: intelligence and culture. Therefore, the upright stance analogically symbolizes the connection between the earthly (material) realm and the heavenly (intellectual or spiritual) realm that man represents. The symbol of the king/emperor (*wang*) engraved on the main Shogi pieces summarizes this idea. As Guénon has pointed out, it is a representation of the far-eastern Great Triad, *Tien-Ti-Jen* (Heaven-Earth-Man), where Man appears as a son of both and a mediator between them (GUÉNON, R. 2003: 30-31). The

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[59] It is interesting to note that the "main" pieces of board games, as we have seen, are situated in the central positions. It is through this center that the link between the microcosm of the game and the microcosm of the player exists. Only through this axis is the player allowed to tamper with the board.

Detail of an "Emperor" piece from a Shogi set. Notice the wang *character in the upper part of the piece. WIKIPEDIA.*

upper line represents providence and everything heavenly; the lower line represents fate and everything earthly. The vertical line represents the Emperor himself, the image of the perfect man, connecting (with his actions) providence and fate in the same way as the *axis mundi* connects Heaven and Earth. The central line represents his will, which allows him to navigate between these two powerful influences (CIRLOT, JE. 2004: 250-251).

In fact, everything that we have said about axis and verticality could be said of the human being (CHAMPEAUX, G. & STERCKX, S. 1972: 255). As we have seen, one of the pillars of ancient traditional cosmological symbolism is the correspondence and relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm, the unity of all existence. The human being is seen as a living representation of each and every pattern in creation (PENNICK, N. 1992: 116). If we come back to board games, we see that the ultimate interaction between the players and the game happens through the playing pieces: vertical accidents in a completely horizontal world (the board). The correspondence between that fact and the upright stance of humans is not accidental. In the case of board games, the

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vertical axis reminds us of transcendence and life, whereas the horizontal can represent passivity and ultimately, death (REVILLA, F. 2007: 61-62). The same happens in nature: vertical trees are alive, fallen trees are dead; walking animals and men are alive, but when they die, they just lie motionless on the ground. From this point of view, verticality implies life, as horizontality its end. Any power or soul that animated and "verticalized" that body is not there anymore. Corpses are as horizontal as are fallen trees.

Playing pieces are the only vertical elements of the board. That makes them also the only "live" elements, the only thing in the microcosm represented on the board that has the gift of movement. This same virtue is also a danger: as they "live", they can "die", be taken out of the game. Whether piling them in a common pool, capturing them or returning them to the beginning of the path there is always a penalty related to the idea of "dying". However, maybe the more interesting analogy is that of Chess. When a playing piece "dies", it is removed from the game. Nevertheless, when the king piece dies it is not taken from the board but flipped sideways, thus ending the game. It seems that the connection of the player with the pieces, the channel through which the other pieces received the "animating energy" of the player, is broken. When the key piece looses this link and "dies", a part of the player also "dies" with it. It is this sharing of mobility that ceases to exist what makes the player lose the game.

3.2 Playing as a rite

As we explained in the last chapter, board games have interesting relationships with myth. In the same way, we can see that there is an analogical relationship between playing board games and the performing of rites. In the first place, because they belong to the same "play" category and share the same analogical

thinking so in a ritual, our world is transformed due to the channelled energies in play, as in a game (FARGAS, A. 1997: 13-14). As the rules and story behind each game can be said to be mythical (defined *in illo tempore*), the act of playing could be seen as a ritual because players re-enact the rules of the game: *"Le joueur, comme le lecteur, est en même temps ici et ailleurs. Mais, simultanément, le jeu s'inscrit dans le monde réel. Si bien que le jeu produit au cœur du monde réel un monde autre. Car, en dernière instance, c'est bien là ce qui fait la fascination du jeu, c'est sa capacité à produire un monde"* (DUFLO, C. 1997: 208). The analogy can be carried over to the similarities between board games and mandalas. The initiate penetrates progressively through the different interpretative layers of the *mandala* as if penetrating a temple. Reading, interpreting and meditating a mandala is equivalent to the ritual march around a temple (*pradakshina*) in which the pilgrim climbs from terrace to terrace towards the "pure lands" (ELIADE, M. 1999: 55-56). At the same signification level as the analogy between meditation of the *mandala* and rite at the temple works, we can see the same analogy with playing.

A rite is only kept alive by the re-telling and re-actualizing gestures of the community it belongs to. Rites assert that all statements within them are true, creating a world of "let us believe" rather than of "let us make believe" (ELIADE, M. 1987: 478). Their value is clarified by Olives: *"Lo mismo sucede con el rito, que tanto como el símbolo y el mito es una parte esencial de la religión. No es una ceremonia compulsiva y arbitraria, como una mera convención ceremonial, que puede llegar a ser fastidiosa. El rito es sintonía, repetición de gestos y ritmos primordiales, concordancia con el aliento cósmico que penetra todas las cosas; tiene valor como rectificación, corrección, curación"* (OLIVES, J. 2006: 56). So then, the rite goes beyond the pure telling, bringing to life the story told by the myth. For the duration of the rite, the participants become heroes and gods, able to perform the same feats that they did *in illo tempore*. They bring back the same good influences to the present.

As rite re-enacts myth through symbols, man symbolically re-enacts the patterns in the cosmos through playing board games. This is the widest and most interesting sense of ritual: integrate the individual in himself, in the collective, in an organized society, in a living Cosmos. All human actions, from the moment that they imply relationship, are rituals. These activities, even those thought "profane" (including games) de-individualize man, making him feel that he is not alone anymore, participating from the order of the cosmos. In ritual, the identity of the human being is revealed as it is shared by the community (ELIADE, M. 1993: 45). As Olives points out: *"Todo acto es en principio ritual y, por tanto, es susceptible de ser comprendido y vivenciado simbólicamente. Puede realizarse conscientemente, en concomitancia vibracional con su significación analógica, haciendo que atraiga la energía o influencia benéfica, curativa y ordenadora que el rito quiere propiciar"* (OLIVES, J. 2006: 57).

In this way, games reflect change in the same way as rites, passing from one state to another. These rites, challenges, aim to reestablish the primigenial cosmos (as order) in the chaos (ELIADE, M. 1987: 471) thus ordering man and his surroundings. So then, let us examine some of the anthropological ideas analogically related to rite and play more often found in board games.

3.2.1 Līlā, *life as play*

In Indian cosmology, play is a top down idea. The qualities of play resonate and resound throughout the whole of the Cosmos. Nevertheless, more than this, qualities of play are integral to the very operation of the Cosmos (SUTTON-SMITH, B. 2001: 55). Therefore, the vision of the world as a game is one of the pillars of Hinduism. In essence, this means that the existence of the world does not follow any cause or has any reason to be, any objective nor any desire

because all of the creation is a purely self contained action, done just for the sake of it, ludic. The divine play, in Sanskrit *līlā*, is what makes this so and teaches us that human life does not have any sense or higher goal that life itself (BIARDEAU, M. 1981: 47). God (Brahma) does not need creation; He is self-sufficient, so finding a rational reason for Brahma to create the world is senseless, because finding reasons for the Absolute and Perfect to change is nonsense. Human actions are guided by a motive, because behind them there is a need, a desire that fuels that motivation. As Brahma does not have any desire, as we know it, he does not have any motive to create. In fact, the "create" concept itself is in this field devoid of significance[60]. Brahma is and can do everything, so He does not need anything else (ELÍADE, M. 1987: 551). The creation of the world is a pure free ludic act for His recreation. As Biardeau explains : "*Il n'y a rien que j'aie l'obligation de faire dans les trois mondes, rien que je n'aie encore obtenu et que je doive obtenir, et cependant je passe ma vie à agir*" (BIARDEAU, M. 1981: 156).

Everything in Creation has a ludic nature, even Creation itself. In the *Mahābhārata* the world is conceived as a game of dice between Shiva and his queen Parvati (ELIADE, M. 1987: 476). It is like a big theatre play, performed not for the sake of this or that actor, but for the play itself: it has to be perfect. However, the fact is that everything is merely Brahma interacting with Brahma. As Grof explains: "*Otras dimensiones importantes del proceso creador que frecuentemente se ponen de relieve son el carácter lúdico, el propio deleite y el humor cósmico del Creador.[...] La creación es una obra cósmica intrincada e infinitamente compleja que Dios, Brahma, crea a partir de sí mismo y dentro de sí. Él es el autor, productor, director y también todos los actores que hacen la obra*" (GROF, S. 2001: 61-62). In fact, it seems that Shiva usually acts in a very playful or ludic way (BIARDEAU, M. 1981: 157).

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[60] *Creation always starts from a need that must be covered. Maybe it would be more correct to talk about "manifest" instead of "create". A change within Brahma Himself is not an act of "creation", just a different way to see Him.*

When Parvati covers Shiva's eyes while lovingly playing, all the cosmos plunges into darkness. Then Shiva creates his third eye, and normality is restored. The dice play of this divine couple represents the continuity of the universe and their absorption with and within it. This "deep play" is one expression of the theological concept of *līlā*, the divine play (ELIADE, M. 1987: 473).

On the other hand, in those cosmologies where premises of play are not embedded at a high level and are not integral to the organization of the cosmos (like the Western ones) play seems to come "from the bottom". So play in the Western culture is seen as not serious, childish, ephemeral but also as subversive and resistant to the normal order of things (SUTTON-SMITH, B. 2001: 55). But even though it seems that both views of play are so far away from one another if we think about the world in terms of *līlā*, it is not difficult to see in the term the same properties that Huizinga and Caillois used in their works for defining games (HUIZINGA, J. 1972: 26-27 and CAILLOIS, R. 1958B: 51-74).

First, the Creation is limited in time, perishable, transitory as opposed to the "no-time" or eternal instant[61] that Brahma is. As a game is also limited in time and does not occupy all the time in our daily lives, so is time within eternity. We cannot conceive of eternity so we tend to think about it as the longest period of time imaginable. That takes us to the other limitation of games: space. As we have seen, games are also limited in space. Not every space in the world is suitable for being used as a playground. Also for playing board games, the playing space must be limited to the board and in very specific positions (as the definition of board game implies). When playing, there is nothing

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[61] Eternity has to be understood not as an infinite sequence of moments but as a perennial instant. The perception of eternity could be described as the simultaneous occurrence of every instant, seen from "outside" time.

important for the players outside the limits of the game; in fact, any movement outside the board is illegal, unthinkable in terms of the game. In the same way, the world is finite: it has a discrete number of square meters. Our nearest environment, Earth itself, is round, and we cannot move outside its boundaries. We are constricted to this world in the same way that playing pieces are to a board. That is opposed to the infinity that Brahma represents, which includes everything. As limited as we are, we can only think of infinity as a vast portion of space, but in fact we should think about it as a point. This is the central point that would later develop into space, as we have seen in the previous chapter.

Every game (and the world where we live in) is subjected to concrete and complex rules, from which the player cannot escape unless he quits the game (dies or transcends). Moreover, Brahma decided to "play the world" in an act of pure free will, and so the goal of Creation is Creation itself. This idea is connected with the idea of "pure" game explained by Huizinga (HUIZINGA, J. 1972: 26). Whereas a worker works for his own profit and benefit, the player is exuberant in his activity. The former does his activity because of need, the latter, because of what he is (COOMARASWAMY, AK. 1977: 150). The best way of living, therefore is to play the game of the world: that is, live for real but without seriousness. When we call God's act a game it is because He has no need for a goal beyond the act itself. In the same way, humans must "play" their lives giving everything they can to make it the best. On this point, work (as daily life) and game are coincident (COOMARASWAMY, A. 1977: 158). While playing, man creates myths, scientific theories, art, knowledge, etc. He becomes a continuation of the primordial divine game, with the whole world as his playground to develop. The idea of "playing to be in the world" is ever-present in some Hindu festivities when social differences, hierarchy and age are forgotten for the participants, because in fact they are an illusion too. In

participating in the ludic spirit of the world (playing and partying together), these participants rediscover themselves and gather as a single community of believers. The whole community participates in the divine game (ELIADE, M. 1987: 365).

The philosophical concept of *līlā* implies forces in constant movement at a universal level. These forces create and destroy the possibility of a phenomenological world in an endless process. *Līlā* is the metaphor of flux, cycle and movement from where the cosmos appears and disappears (ELIADE, M. 1987: 364). As we have pointed out above, this world can be seen as an illusion, which is simply created and destroyed periodically. The same happens to man in this world, who dies and (if he still needs purification) is reincarnated following the wheel of *Samsara*. The idea of flux and change is related to that of *maya* (the phenomenological world as an illusion). Even though we can perceive the world through our eyes (at a physical level) and we can also think about it and try to understand it by formulating laws and creating science, all these perceptions are equivocal. This does not mean that one's vital experience and one's environment do not exist, but in Divine Time, they are completely relative because "tomorrow" they will not exist. The same problem comes when trying to differentiate "here" from "there" or "white" from "black", because in the end all these relative concepts are part of the Oneness of God. If we want to understand the world as a game, we have to see it through *maya*, and we can only do this if we use our transcendental sight, that is, the intuitive and spiritual part of the human being. Only by taking the role of a playful mystic and resorting to our inner wisdom can we find the truth behind illusion and live life meaningfully (WILBER, K. 1997: 13-19). Only in playing life, can we understand it.

3.2.2 Spiritual ascension: the ultimate goal

As mentioned above, the universe of board games is essentially horizontal (LHÔTE, JM. 1976: 71). Actually, in traditional cosmological symbolism the horizontal dimension of space is considered to represent surface, limitation, passivity, quantity and matter. Opposed to that, the vertical dimension of space represents height, but also quality, infinity, salvation and spirituality (REVILLA, F. 2007: 61-62). It is easy to see that a limited, square surface such as a board game is automatically related to horizontality for practical reasons. Even though it is possible to imagine ways of doing so, playing a board game can not happen outside the horizontal plane. However, we have seen above that the cross represents expansion in a horizontal (material) dimension, limited by

The medieval philosopher Ramon Llull explained reality as superimposed levels of existence, which he represented as steps on a ladder. In this image we can see how Homo is below Caelum and Angeli. (ELECTORIUM PARVUM SEU BREVICULUM)

the square. Its center is the vertical axis, which connects the different levels of reality.

All religious traditions deal with spiritual evolution. This evolution is usually represented as a series of steps or stages that have to be achieved, one at a time. So then, spiritual improvement is symbolically represented as a path or stairs to be followed up a hill or a ladder that has to be climbed up to Heaven. Many myths talk about a tree, a vine, a rope, a spider thread or a ladder that connects Heaven to Earth. The same idea appears in rites where the priest or the initiate has to climb a tree barehanded (ELIADE, M. 1999: 51). Coherently relating this ladder to the *axis mundi* (explained above when talking about the centre), we see that moving between levels of reality is only possible at this precise spot. The symbolic relationship is easy to establish when we think about what the function of a ladder is: to make accessible what is out of reach (REVILLA, F. 2007: 136-137). In fact, we can see that death itself is the greatest "change of level" that a human being can conceive of. The soul of the deceased climbs to Heaven with the help of a ladder or a rope. Initiation is, in a certain way, death in one life and rebirth in a new one. That is the reason why we can relate this ritual climbing analogically with initiation rituals. As Revilla points out: *"[…] pretendiera llegar –fuese físicamente o más bien por modo emocional- hasta la altura donde moran los seres superiores"* (REVILLA, F. 2007: 87).

As we have seen, labyrinths and, of course, board games, especially those based on paths, can be analogically seen as a way of spiritual improvement. Now we will not delve into their centrality or their configuration as sequential paths but in their resemblances with the initiation ascents. They follow the same idea of a difficult path to purification which, once difficulties are overcome, leads us to the ultimate beatific place. It does not matter whether we call it Heaven, Paradise or Nirvana (FABREGAS, X. 1987: 106).

The clearest example is the Indian game Moksha-patamu, which is both a path game and a form of moral instruction to teach children the idea that good deeds are rewarded and evil deeds punished. The goal of the whole route is Nirvana, this being the end of the path (FINKEL, I. in MACKENZIE, C. & FINKEL, I. 2004: 59). In this game, the lower squares are concerned with vices or hellish states, and the upper ones with spirituality and heavenly states. The ladders (or sometimes red snakes) take the player up and the snakes (or sometimes black snakes) bring the player down. As an example from an actual board, we can climb from "Mercy (17)" to "Abode of Brahma (69)" advancing fifty-two squares in just one movement. In the same way if one lands on "Egoism (55)" one is cast down fifty-three positions to *maya* "Illusion (2)". The meaning of these movements is that a person of good deeds ascends the ladder and reaches a higher position, nearer to the "lotus feet of the God". If that person fails and commits sin (represented by the snake), he is punished, thus moving him away from Nirvana. Man is the architect of his own fate says the Hindu law of *Karma,* and the sinner can become a virtuous person through good actions (BALAMBAL, V. 2005: 85). In China and Japan similar games exit, but even though the rules and shape of the game are very similar, the goal is not spiritual but financial and professional success. Material success in China was achieved through bureaucratic promotion, and that is the "theme" of this kind of game (LO, A. in MACKENZIE, C. & FINKEL, I. 2004: 65-72), ranging from religion and travel to local customs and theater. These games were mostly spiral in shape, starting from the outside and proceeding to the central point.

In a spiritual text from India called the *Sar Bachan*, the four groups of different-colored markers from Pachisi are said to represent the four stages of life through which all souls must pass: vegetation, insect, bird/fish, and mammal. After each form of life is experienced, the soul then progresses through all

forms of human experience. The dice of cause and effect determines its luck in each experience. In the game of Pachisi, each color group has its own path to heaven that passes through its home. Similarly, in the game of life, each soul reaches the gates of heaven by traveling every imaginable path of religious endeavor. Upon death, the soul exits the game through that particular path's version of heaven only to find itself back on the board following rebirth. Finally, after the soul has had millions of chances on the dice board, it meets a *Sat Guru* or True Master, who escorts the soul off the board, once and for all, and into the imperishable region known as *Sach Khand*. Here the soul has become one with God and is, finally, the "god" of its own universe where cause and effect are no longer an issue (GABRIEL, K. 1998).

As we have discussed above, when talking about the heroic challenge, the player as hero has to face the difficulties of the game. The exhausting path that the pieces move along takes its toll again and again, sending pieces back (that is, downwards). The absolute is not reached easily, so the ascension is a very demanding adventure for the hero (the player) (REVILLA, F. 2007: 110). At the same time, with each death the player earns something: experience. Therefore, when the game is finished, the player is not the same anymore: he has changed for the better. Whether victorious or defeated, the gaming experience changes players as the ascension changes the initiate. They gain knowledge about the game, but mostly about themselves (and their opponents).

We see that the idea of goal, which is the objective of the game, can be intuitively related to that of happiness. Both players intend to achieve the goal before their opponent does. Even if there is nothing except the game itself at stake, they play to win. This is the part of the playful spirit: winning a game is always related to states of happiness. In general, we are happier if we win than if we lose. However, the happiness obtained from winning a game is always

short-term, a mere shadow of what ultimate happiness is. We have to understand that, at a religious and philosophical level, the "goal" of life is also happiness. This idea can be found in every religion at the heart of every culture. Life is to be lived with long-term happiness in mind. Only in this way, does life make sense.

This is analogically related to the idea of illumination, understood as the finding of long-term happiness. This "illumination" is related to some kind of transcendental achievement that helps understanding. Knowledge about Cosmos and the sense of life (truth, in short) is symbolically represented as light. That is why the term illumination applies to happiness. As light is related to spirit, to receive or see this light is to gain consciousness of the center or source of this light and therefore, to have spiritual strength (CIRLOT, J-E. 2003: 293).

In general, we can see that the goal of board games is either to exit all pieces or to achieve a special (harmonious) position on the board. We see that the final position of the game in either case relates to the concept of harmony. Therefore, this harmony is granted by "exiting" the pieces or by creating a favorable and harmonious *status quo* that grants victory (i.e. there are pieces of only one color still in the game). The game starts with an unstable situation, which cannot last. Achieving the goal consists in transforming this unstable situation into one of harmony, peace, end of struggle. Analogically speaking, this same idea can be related to human existence as a whole.

In those board games where the goal is to leave the board, the analogy between the goal and life can be understood through the aforementioned analogy of ascension. In fact, we can see the whole ascension from a wider point of view, covering the whole of human life. As in the ascension analogy, reaching the "top" is the goal. Therefore, seen from this perspective, winning is achieving illumination. As we enter the field of eschatology, the path of illumination is sometimes related to that of death. Only through death and ulterior transcendence can one achieve this state of higher existence. It somehow refers to life as a prison, a cave, an illusion, from which one has to escape. This escape can only happen through a hole, an aperture, an exit from the cosmic matrix. So then, in fact we have to "come out" from existence to ultimately understand the Cosmos as a whole. The Platonic Cavern
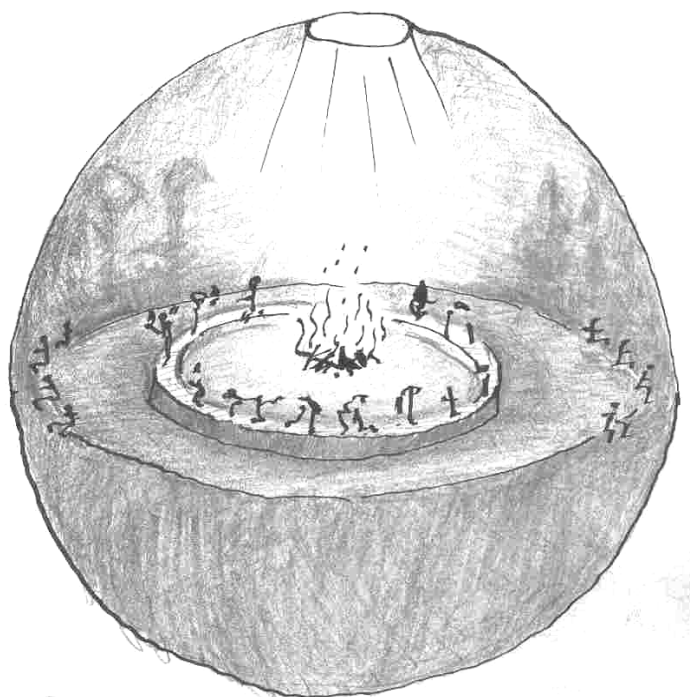
Olives' three-dimensional interpretation of the Platonic Cavern (OLIVES, J. 2006: 412-413).

exemplifies this idea in ancient Greek mythology. Some people live trapped in a cavern, seeing only shadows of reality. When someone is able to liberate himself and look back to the fire, he can see part of the truth. However, only through coming out of the cave and seeing the Sun can this wise man understand the magnitude of his slavery (REP. VII 514A-520). Olives interpreted this traditional image in a three-dimensional way, reinforcing even more its symbology. The aspirant to illumination walks through the horizontal plane, trying to orientate his intellect. Once he finds the connection with his higher self, represented by the central fire, he can ascend to the higher levels of consciousness, passing through the cupola. He does so through a hole in the cavern ceiling, representing the exit door from the cosmic matrix (OLIVES, J. 2006: 412-413). In the same way, in games such as Pachisi, Ashta-kashte and, as we have seen, Twenty Squares and Fifty-eight Holes the exit is through the center. All these analogies further reinforce the idea of liberation after a difficult struggle.

We have a clear example in the game of Mehen, directly related to the funerary environment. Victory in the game seems to have become symbolic of the attainment of life after death. Peter Piccione has demonstrated that in the First Intermediate Period the god Mehen became the focus of a body of secret knowledge occasionally referred to as the "Mysteries of Mehen". Those privy to them were thought to be able to vanquish the enemies of Ra, to attain victory over their own enemies and ultimately to achieve safe passage through the Underworld and return with Ra to their own resurrection and rebirth. The spells speak of "the Roads of Mehen", talking about the serpent's coils as a road that leads to the sun god who is seated in the center (PICCIONE, P. 1990: 43-52). These roads are said to be "roads of fire… millions of years in length" and are guarded by doors that make those that do not know how to open

them turn back (i.e. those not initiated in the Mysteries of Mehen) (KENDALL, T. in FINKEL, I. 2007: 42).

Senet was also related to the funerary environment. The name of the game, *snt*, was translated as "going out". This name would be used both because its goal mechanics and the fact that it represented the passing of the soul of the dead from this life to another. It is no surprise that Senet is one of the most common games found in tombs (along with Mehen). Even though the detailed rules are lost, we know it was a path game. The idea of "passing" was related to the Book of the Dead, specifically to the 17th spell. The ultimate goal of Senet is to bet the "invisible opponent", which prevents the player from reaching the other world. According to Cazaux, this invisible opponent is the god Mehen Himself, which is preventing unworthy souls sitting next to Ra in his ship sailing through the underworld (CAZAUX, J-L 2003: 14-18). At the same time, the game was a conduit from this world to the underworld (and vice-versa), letting both the living and the dead to play together. The spell in the Coffin Text 405 says of the deceased: "Let him sing, let him dance, and let him receive ornaments. Let him play Senet with those who are on earth." (PICCIONE, P. in FINKEL, I. 2007: 59). Therefore, Senet could be seen as the "hole" through which one can exit reality, and come back.

The legend of the invention of Nard also speaks of this game in a metaphysical register, as we have seen. The pieces are said to "revolve and move according to the seven [planets] and twelve [zodiacal signs]. When they hit one [counter] [...] it is just as people in the world smite one another. When, by the turn of the die, they collect all [the counters], it is an analogy to people, who all pass out of the world" (SOAR, M. IN FINKEL, I. 2004: 221). The analogy between exiting the board and passing from this world to the other pervades.

In the same line of thought would be Moshka-patamu, as we have discussed above. Reaching the top is in fact reaching Nirvana, the dissolution within God. This game is also called *Paramapadam*, which can be translated as "Reaching the lotus feet of the God", referring to the lotus depicted at the feet of all representations of Shiva (BALAMBAL, V. 2005: 82). Here again we se how the goal of the board game is related to the ultimate goal of existence: reintegration with the One. The analogy extends back and forth from this point. That is, if we see the analogy between the goals of board games based on paths and the "goal" of life, this same analogy reinforces that of the path as being analogous to life (as explained above). As Gabriel explains: "Just as the object of the Hindu dice game of Pachisi is to enter the gates of heaven, the object of the Navajo stick-dice game is to return to the underworld through the place of emergence" (GABRIEL, K. 1996: 14).

We have commented above that in those games not based on paths (in fact, the rest of the existing games), the goal is to achieve a certain position or winning condition on the board. We have called this a stable position or equilibrium, in short, harmony. As an example, taking all the enemy pieces out of the game creates a stable situation. Without contest, there is no struggle. When a Go game ends, the board cannot change any more. All the spaces have been contested, won or lost, but they are defined. When Mancala games end, no piece may be moved. Either they are all captured or in a position which does not allow further play: stability, certainty. The organic harmony that a finished board game represents, connects with the idea of the end of struggle and conflict. As explained at the beginning of this research project, board games need to have a degree of uncertainty. At the end of the game, this uncertainty is resolved and the microcosm that the game represents achieves a final position. However, as in the macrocosm, this stability only lasts until a

new game starts. There is no "final" state of a board game, only a series of moves.

In Hnefatafl both kinds of goal are possible. In the first place, the white King has to leave the board, this time not through its center but by reaching its borders, its limits. We can see here one more twist of the symbolism attached to Hnefatafl. The King is in a very desperate situation: he is abandoning the center, the place where he should be, and exiting the board through the "castles" in the corners. In doing so, he in fact founds another center, saving his life in the process. When the black player wins, the King is captured, thus finishing the struggle. We can think that the winning black player is in fact the next white player. Black pieces occupy the central castle, bring their own king and then become white, only to be assaulted again by other black pieces.

In one way or another, the whole game is directed towards its goal because, as we have seen, it must be limited in time and space. After a successful game, we can see how the goal of the game shifts from the gaming rules back to real life. The situation created in the game suddenly affects real life, because it generates one or more "winners" and one or more "losers". The rules of the game only affect how players interact with each other and with the board and game pieces. When these rules cease to apply, at the end of the game, the fact of achieving the goal has no effect on the game itself but outside. The interaction of the players after a game is affected by their past actions in the playful environment. This is a very interesting idea, which leads us to talk about the use of board games as oracles.

3.2.3 Randomness: fate, fortune telling and oracles

It is not a coincidence that a great number of the ancient games that we know about have a generous amount of randomness in them. In Antiquity, the most usual kind of board games are those based on paths. All these games share a special trait that makes them what they are: dice or some sort of randomizing implement. When we talk about dice we do not have to think only about the six-sided cubic gaming implement that we are used to, but to any randomizer that produces more or less equiprobable results. These randomizers can be found in almost every historical or prehistoric culture, as Heijdt asserts: "[…] very early prehistoric communities were in the habit of using these little magical objects for necromancy and fortune telling. These kinds of use can be found in (pre)history with populations spread all over the globe, with the Germans as well as the North American Indians, Mayas, Aztecs, Eskimos, Africans and Asiatic peoples" (HEIJDT, L. 2003: 18).

It seems that the first randomizers used in board games were two-sided. Coins did not exist, so people played with any more or less flat object that had a clearly distinctive front and back[62]. A large number of these objects were thrown together, and counted in different ways. We know that in the year 2000 B.C. the Chinese played Liubo with similar sticks (HEIJDT, L 2003:19) and the Egyptians used them to play Senet and Twenty Squares (CAZAUX, J-L 2003: 14-18, 27-29). Indians still use *kauri* shells or a four-sided long die to play Pachisi (CAZAUX, J-L 2003: 47-52). This at once introduces the well-known problem of calculating the odds of various numerical scores when there is the possibility that the dice can fall in different ways, which add up to the same score. Nevertheless, as this may seem a trivial matter for present-day students,

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[62] Randomizers come as sticks with a flat and a concave part, *kauri* shells, filled half-nuts, bark squares, little flat boomerangs, flat sticks with different markings on each side, etc. We can find many very interesting examples in HEIJDT, J. 2003: 16

we have to remember that the correct way of calculating the odds on throws was not fully theorized until the seventeenth century, although it had been a topic of speculation for some time (TAIT, W.J. in FINKEL, I. 2007: 50).

Another of the more widespread and most used randomizers around the world is knucklebones[63]. In many prehistoric civilizations and even nowadays, woman and children used to play all kinds of games of skill with the so-called *astragals*. These implements have four faces, which allow a wider range of random results than only two faces. Of course, they were given different values and were used for gambling (HEIJDT, L 2003: 18). Astragals were also used in board games, as in the Fifty-eight Holes game, where faces had the values of 0-0-2-3 (CAZAUX, J-L 2003: 20-21). Indians did not use knucklebones, but rather elongated dice, which act as four sided dice.[64]

As we have seen, the challenge a game presents is a very important element in it. A way to alter this challenge is to introduce an element of randomness into it. If some of the gaming elements are unknown to the player, he cannot flawlessly plan ahead all the movements that would bring him to victory. He has to react, to choose, to decide and sometimes to risk, because there is something in the game that makes him face the unknown constantly. This hidden information comes in many shapes, but one of the most popular possibilities is to directly use some random generating device that makes games non-predictable. As an example, we can think about all those games that use cards or tiles (and anything that can be randomly mixed). In not knowing which pieces or cards will be played with or what the next draw is,

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[63] Knucklebones or astragals are a special bone situated in the ankles of the ruminant animals. They have been removed, boiled and used as playing implements since the dawn of man. In Roman times, they were called *astragalus*, or simply *talus*.

[64] Other four-sided dice exist, but they are based in a completely different source of randomness. The pyramids used to play the game of Ur had two out of four painted vertexes. A number of these pyramids were thrown and then the painted vertexes counted.

the challenge increases. Another possibility is the use of dice, teetotums, kauris, etc., which have different faces or positions. If we base some mechanisms of the game on randomness, we can be sure that is very difficult for two games to be identical or even predictable. Moreover, the players no longer have complete control over the game. In this way, they connect with the ineffable source of fairness that is randomness.

One of the major beliefs of the scientific community about the origin of board games is that their first manifestations were divination systems used by primitive civilizations. These divination systems were individual, but at some point, they started to be used as a sort of "fate tests", needing two or more people. The next step would have been the loss of their original sacred meaning and their popularization, becoming a sort of superstitious attachment to games themselves. Once popularized, the symbolic and oracular meaning of board games was abandoned but left dormant, embedded in their shapes and rules. As Culin explains: "Upon comparing the games of civilized people with those of primitive society many points of resemblance are seen to exist, with the principal difference that games occur as amusements or pastimes among civilized men, while among savage and barbarous people they are largely sacred and divinatory" (CULIN, S. 1991: XVII). If in their origins this early form of oracular games was a matter for the shamans, priests and wise people it is easy to see that without their knowledge it would soon decay. They were the only ones capable of interpretation and were attuned to the appropriate level of reality where these interpretative symbolic keys work. That is why when board games become more popular the divination ritual performed with them loses its original meaning. Maybe that is why there are so many taboos about games: in order to prevent their trivialization and abuse as oracles (PENNICK, N. 1992: 230). We want to note here that even though it could seem from these assertions that divination games were not proper games (in the ludic sense of

the word), that would be a careless statement. In fact, these games are part of the cult for their ludic aspect (HUIZINGA, J. 1958: 76). Players played to know their fate, so winning and losing through randomness became a way to playfully communicate with God.

If we extrapolate this idea to a wider scope, we can see that in fact, not only isolated random implements but also board games could be used to channel the will of the gods. Therefore, the idea of good and bad throws in games (which make you win or lose) is directly related to divination. The fact of winning or losing a game was seen as directly related to "winning" and "losing" in real life (LHÒTE, JM. 1976: 131). The ritual function of throwing lots and dice and in board games is clear. A good throw or a good game is symbolically equivalent to a fortunate life, following the will of the Gods. As an example, Pausanias in his *Ελλάδος Περιήγησις* describes an oracle within a cave, near Bura in Achaia. In the cave, presided over by Hercules' statue there was an oracle telling the future through a tablet and knucklebones called *Herakles Buraicos*: "On descending from *Bura* towards the sea you come to a river called *Buraicos*, and to a small Herakles in a cave. He too is called *Buraicos*, and here one can divine by means of a tablet and dice. He who inquires of the god offers up a prayer in front of the image, and after the prayer he takes four dice, a plentiful supply of which are near Herakles, and throws them upon the table. For every figure made by the dice there is an explanation expressly written on the tablet" (PAUSANIAS, VII 25.10).

This ritual was meant, through play, to lead us directly to knowledge of the will of God. Nowadays it is very difficult for us to think that God or any kind of divine intervention has anything to do with games, but for ancient people God was present through causality, that is, through randomness. In the ancient, analogical mentality, everything in the cosmos is connected. That

means that nothing is accidental or random: everything that happens has its own meaning and reason to be in God's "plan". Therefore, in classical-traditional thought randomness does not exist as such, because randomness is not considered as such but rather as destiny, or God's will. In fact, the Spanish word for randomness is "azar". Etymologically it is a deformation of the Arabic word *al-azahar* ("white flower", as referred to the orange tree flower). In the time of the hispano-arabic civilization, dice were called *azahar*, because the highest scoring face was marked with this flower, symbolizing fecundity and of course, wealth (LHÔTE, JM 1994: 25). Probability mathematics, like our system of numerals, came to us via the Arabs (HACKING, I. 1999: 6) from a much older Hindu tradition. In any case, the true start of probability as a science in the Western world is around 1660, when Huygens wrote the first probability textbook (HACKING, I. 1999: 11). Before that, few references to good combinational or probabilistic calculus are known to be reliable. A few examples of these are Raimundus Lullius, who in his *Ars Combinatoria,* used combinational elements to define God, and Galileo Galilei who, by observation, found that there are combinations of three dice that occur often (HACKING, I. 1999: 51-53).

This does not mean that any notions about probability were known[65] before that time, only that they were not thought to be a science to discuss (HACKING, I. 1999: 1-10). Aristotle himself said "probable is that which happens often" (in his *Rethoric*, 1402a 5-30). In ancient Chinese texts onphilosophy, medicine and architecture a science based on meaningful coincidences was mentioned. They did not ask "what caused what" but "what likes to happen with what", and

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[65] In the *Mahabharata* there are some good examples. In one of them Nala loses her kingdom by gambling, after being possessed by Kali. On a journey she meets Rtuparna, who is able to avert the number of leaves in a tree by only looking a single twig. He says that he can do that because he possesses the science of the dice and the numbers, that he teaches to Nala in order to recover her kingdom.

this "liking" was what caused shells to fall in one way or another (JUNG, C. 1997: 211). For the Chinese, there was no problem in admitting that nature was chaotic and had "strange attractors" which facilitated certain things happening. Randomness was not something accidental but the synchronization of a situation with a favorable context (COPPIN, F. & MARCHAND, M. 2006: 141).

Therefore, in antiquity, board games with implements such as dice, astragals or teetotums were not considered "randomness" games but oracles of the gods. Destiny was the force that conditioned human lives, and the central theme of many Greek tragedies. Greeks and Romans personalized luck as a goddess *Tyche* that gave and took luck, either favouring her adorers or acting mysterious and blind, as Justice does. This daughter of Zeus (called *Fortuna* by the

Mediaeval representation of the Godess Fortuna (behind the wheel). Mankind is under Her rule, and by it the poor can become king and vice versa.

Romans), gave and took whatever she wanted from mortals (MORIN, C. 1991: 12). Players used to pray for the protection of the goddess before playing, because they knew that the result was in her hands. Games were seen as divine gifts and instruments, and in playing them, one was asking the divinity to manifest. In order to be fully understood, this result had to be interpreted by priests or experts in divination (FARGAS, A. 1997: 18). In China, ancient games and divination seem to have been associated with agriculture. The Shang (16th-11th centuries BC) used cracks in animal bones and turtle shells to cyclically predict harvests and weather (WATANABE, Y. 1977: 64-65).

During medieval times, the idea of the cyclical movement of fortune was still in use. They saw this idea through the image of the "wheel of fortune", in which one can see the rise and fall of man through randomness. One of the most beautiful examples can be found in *Carmina Burana*[66] as the piece "*Fortuna Imperatrix Mundi*":

Latin original	English translation
O Fortuna,	*O Fortune,*
velut Luna,	*like the moon*
status variabilis,	*you are changeable,*
semper cresis	*ever waxing*
aut decresis;	*and waning;*
vita detestabilis	*hateful life*
nunc obdurat	*first oppresses*
et tunc curat	*and then soothes*
ludo mentis aciem,	*as fancy takes it,*
egestatem	*poverty*
potestatem	*and power*
dissolvit ut glaciem.	*it melts them like ice.*
Sors immanis	*Fate - monstrous*
et inanis,	*and empty*
rota tu volubilis,	*you whirling wheel,*
status malus	*you are malevolent,*

[66] *Carmina Burana* or "Songs of Benediktbeuern" is a collection of 13th-century stories, poems and songs written by goliards, which was discovered in 1803 at a monastery in Beuern, Bavaria.

vana salus	*well-being is in vain*
semper dissolubilis,	*and always fades to nothing,*
obumbrata	*shadowed*
et velata	*and veiled*
michi quoque niteris;	*you plague me too;*
nunc per ludum	*now through the game*
dorsum nudum	*I bring my bare back*
fero tui sceleris.	*to your villainy.*
Sors salutis	*Fate is against me*
et virtutis	*in health*
michi nunc contraria	*and virtue,*
est affectus	*driven on*
et defectus	*and weighted down,*
semper in angaria.	*always enslaved.*
Hac in hora	*So at this hour*
sine mora	*without delay*
cordum pulsum tangite;	*pluck the vibrating strings;*
quod per sortem	*since Fate*
sternit fortem,	*strikes down the strong man,*
mecum omnes plangite!	*everyone weep with me!*

Many board games (seen as oracles) from different civilizations were used as judges to take difficult decisions. Randomness was seen as the voice of the ancestors, favoring one or other player (BIEDERMANN, H. 2000: 254). As an example, for the Alagya people from Ivory Coast, playing Mancala during the night is taboo. There is only one exception: when they have to choose a new leader. The interested participants play all night long, talking among themselves in a secret tongue, unknown to the uninitiated. In the morning, the winner has been chosen by the ancestors, and becomes their new leader (SANTOS, E. 1995: 52-53). However, we do not need to go so far afield to find an example: in the Old Testament (EX 28,30 & LV 8,8) the implements called *urim* and *tummim*[67]*,* appear as a means to know God's Will. The high priest of Israel carried them with him in his pectoral (called Pectoral of Judgment). They had

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[67] In the *Vulgata* they were translated as "doctrine" and "truth", but a narrower, more precise translation would be "clarity" and "sanctity" (VIGOROUX, F. 1912: 2364)

two distinct faces, like coins (VIGOROUX, F. 1912: 2364). The *urim* and *tummim* were thrown in the air and in landing on one side or the other answered the questions from the Priest, showing God's will (LHÔTE, JM 1994: 63). This consultation could only be made by the High Priest, who was able to interpret the designs and portents, and only in a very specific and elaborated ceremony. This ritual was even at that moment already considered ancient, maybe descending from Babylonia, and it was already out of use in the III B.C. (VIGOROUX, F. 1912: 2362, 2366).

Even if we cannot talk about this ritual as a game or even part of one we can see that a system based on randomness was considered the earthly expression of the divine Will. That same kind of ritual was used in the Egyptian Late Period to settle troublesome legal disputes, with reed strips folded with the names of the litigants written on them. Taking lots decided the outcome of the trial, which was seen as expressing the Will of God (TAIT, W.J. in FINKEL, I. 2007: 51). In the same way, throwing a stone over the shoulder in order to make it stop near the center of a specially drawn diagram on the floor (very similar to a Merels board) was used in Czechia. The accused and the plaintiff had to hit the circle in the center blindfolded, and the one who did was considered as telling the truth, in accordance with God's will (BERGER, F. 2004: 12).

In India the philosophical concept of *karma*, or fate, was reproduced in games by the use of dice (MARK, M. in FINKEL, I. 2007: 151). In the same way, we have some passages in the *Rig-Veda* where we can find prayers to the dice, as if they were gods or heroes: "The Heroes dressed with fire the fatted whether [sic]: the dice were thrown by way of sport and gaming. Two reach the plain amid the heavenly waters, hallowing and with means of purifying" (RIG X.27.17). The player talks to them, takes them as testimonies of his prayer and messengers of

superior powers. Dice are "sons" of the Great *Vibhâdaca* (He who distributes luck). They have the power to establish a relationship with the soul of the player and they are literally charmed, with the power to decide on his life (LHÔTE, JM. 2995:35).

In fact, we find this kind of relationship in Mesopotamia and the Indus valley circa 2000 BC, in Egypt around 1990-1780 BC, in Crete (1800-1650 BC) and in the area of Palestine in around the XVI century BC (ELIADE, M. 1987: 469). In fact, the game of Ur has also been related to divination, because it has great similarities with liver divination notations. There are also occurrences of the game of Twenty Squares drawn at the back of a clay liver model, presumably related to the twenty parts into which a liver was divided (BECKER, A. in FINKEL, I. 2006:12-14). In the article by I. Finkel discussing the rules of the game of Ur, he also notes this relationship (FINKEL, I. in DE VOOGT, J. 1995: 64-72). However, in another research article, Finkel points out that there is no evidence that these games were preponderantly used as fortune-telling devices (FINKEL, I. in FINKEL, I. 2007: 25-26).

It is customary in Korea to use the Nyout sticks for divination. They are related to the I-Ching and to the sixty-four hexagrams (CULIN, S. 1991: 72-73). In any case, it seems that the power of divination attributed to dice can easily pass to board games with random generating implements, such as path games. The result is, as Dunn-Vaturi explains : *"Certains jeux dépassent le cadre ludique car les instruments du hasard, dés et astragales, représentent l'intervention divine sous le cours de la vie matérialise par le déplacement des pions sur le plateau. De manière universelle, le jeu est détourné à des fins divinatoires."* (DUNN-VATURI in SCHÄEDLER, U. 2007: 21). However, this can also be applied to games without manifest randomness. Fairbairn postulates that the Weiqi board could have been used for divination, as being related to the Luo-Shu. As early history of Weiqi is still being debated,

nothing concrete can be proved. However, there are myths about its existence, one of which assumes that Go was an ancient fortune-telling device used by Chinese cosmologists to simulate the universe's relationship to an individual, with the balance of Yin and Yang. (FAIRBAIRN, J. in FINKEL, I. 2007: 133-135).

So then, we can see that divination is directly related to board games in Antiquity. The whole game becomes a channel to know the will of the gods. To win is a good omen, as losing is a bad one. The winner in the game would also "win" in life. This idea can be better seen in one of the elements that usually accompanies board games: gambling.

3.2.4 Sacred & profane gambling

Gambling is a powerful gaming experience that has always moved (or even obsessed) players. The truth is that even though most of the players over the world gamble moderately and with positive results for family life and pleasure, most of the literature (modern and ancient) focuses only on the pathological gambler. Playing for money is (and was) almost a universal practice and a normal form of play for both children and adults, not always being intrinsically motivated (SUTTON-SMITH, B. 2001: 67). In any way, there are multiple accounts of compulsive gamblers and their terrible losses, such as *Yudhisthira* in the *Mahabharata*, who loses his wealth, possessions, kingdom, troops, his brothers, , his queen and his freedom. These mythical teachings warn the player about what is at stake when playing games for something beyond the game itself.

Playing with such an essential thing for life such as money, is to play with real life itself, thus breaking the essential barrier between game and real life. When money and games coincide, players tend to shift the game from *otium* (leisure) into *nec otium* (non-leisure, that is, business). This dichotomy between leisure

and business exists since ancient times. The former encompasses spontaneous and free activities such as culture, education, art or games. To the latter belongs activities such as commerce, work, production or gain (LOPEZ, R. 1997: 49). Playing for money would fit just in between, being a game for gain.

However, ritual gambling was a common practice in ancient cultures. People gambled to please the Gods, in order to ensure fertility or rain, give or extend life, expel demons or heal illnesses (CULIN, S. 1975: 34). Therefore, as Lhôte asserts, it is not the fact of gambling (and cheating) that is dangerous or

Tibetan representation of Samsara, the Wheel of Suffering. Note the three animals at its centre: Pig, Snake and Eagle.

harmful for man but his disposition while doing so (LHÔTE, JM. 1994: 39). As we have seen, even though gambling is seen as a dangerous activity, it is sometimes seen as the lesser evil. In Tibet there is an annual celebration where a priest, in representation of the powers of light and the great Lama, plays against another priest, characterized as the king of the evil spirits. They gamble upon the kingship of the land, and the winner is to be announced as the spiritual and terrene leader of the country. The thing is that the Lama always wins because he is using loaded dice, and he then pursues and banishes the demon (ELIADE, M. 1987: 473). Here we can see gambling and cheating in a sacred environment, where the Lama uses the tricks and methods of the "dark side" to keep the light in place. The figure of a mythical gambler appears in many cultures. It is interesting to note that this same figure is at the same time a cultural hero, bringing civilization to his people (GABRIEL, K. 1996: 23).

Gambling games provide an experience of otherness or altered states of consciousness. In addition, these or similar states of mind are as essential to religious ritual and prayer as they are to game involvement. In both cases, one becomes lost in the experience and thus transcends daily cares and concerns (SUTTON-SMITH, B. 2001: 67). Both believers and players see in these "transcendental" experiences something that gives sense to their lives. Therefore, the gambler is somehow unknowingly looking for divinity. To be certain, on the surface they are seeking economic fortune, but they are also seeking a personal transformation, for that feeling of invincibility and liberation, even if only at the moment of exhilaration. This moment is indeed transitory, and the seeking of its perpetual repetition is what can sometimes throw the individual out of integrity, causing addictive cycles. Whatever the forces are that the gambler believes is causing him or her to win or to lose; they can never sustain or nurture the gambler. Of course, these forces do not exist outside of the self, but lie within one's own actions.

Every great religion has some kind of prohibition or at least rejection of the union of games and money. Gaming for money (gambling) is seen as a clear source of trouble for man (PENNICK, N. 1992: 230-231). For the Hindu, gambling goes against the improvement of the soul. We can find references against gambling in the *Mahabharata*, spoken by *Krshna* Himself, warning how dangerous playing for money can be (ELIADE, M. 1987: 472). After that, he continues explaining that gambling is the worst vice, because it is purely born out of desire (desire to play and desire for money). This idea brings us to the center of the Hindu doctrine: desire. Everything that generates desire ties men more and more to the earth, taking them away from illumination and Nirvana. Gambling, that is, falling into desire is returning to the *Samsara*, the wheel of reincarnations[68].

On the other hand, we cannot fully understand the symbolism of gambling without its religious significance (ELIADE, M. 1987: 468). In this context, gambling goes together with divinatory and oracular practices, but also with foundational and cosmogonic myths. In his book on North American Indian games, Culin summarizes the common pattern of references to gambling games in the origin of myths of numerous tribes. As he explains: "They usually consist of a series of contests in which the demiurge, the first man, the culture hero, overcomes some opponent, a foe of the human race, by exercise of superior cunning, skill or magic" (CULIN, S. 1975: 32).

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[68] The *Samsara* is mostly represented as a wheel. Man reincarnates through different worlds up to when he is able to become completely free and escape. In the center of the wheel, at its axis there is the main idea of this doctrine, represented by three animals biting their tails in a circle (a pig, a snake and an eagle). The pig symbolizes ignorance, the eagle, desire, and the snake, anger. In this way, we learn that ignorance of the world makes us have material desires. When we cannot achieve those desires, we get frustrated, angry, blind and then more ignorant!

In the *Rig-Veda* there are some poems dedicated to the gambler: "Indeed, by celestial intelligence, he creates victory, when he, a gambler collects his winnings in time. Divinely-desired, he overwhelms the offerer who does not withhold his riches, with wealth." (RIG.X.42.9). Dice are seen as the cube, being perfection and a repetition of the symbol of four, the square, symbolizing the four *yugas*, etc. (COOPER, J. 2000: 65).

Following the same idea but in a different context, an Egyptian legend explained by Plutarch (in his *De iside et Osiride*, 12) explains that the goddess Nut (the sky) becomes the lover of and pregnant by Geb (the earth, and her son too). For this incestuous relationship, she is cursed by Ra to be unable to give birth "any day of any month" (MEEKS, D. 1993: 119). Finally, Nut implores Thoth for help, because her sons keep growing inside her, causing her great pain. According to Plutarch, Thoth plays Petteia[69] with Selene, the Moon, and by gambling he wins a 72nd part of her moonlight (probably cheating). With that amount of light, he manages to create five more days that he adds to the calendar. In these days, not belonging to "any day of any month", Nut is able to give birth to five gods, Osiris amongst them (MEEKS, D. 1993: 333). We should remember that Thoth is the accountant of the gods and works as intermediary, lawmaker and inventor of the calendar, science, writing and of course, of games, trickery, robbing and gambling (MEEKS, D. 1993: 149).

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[69] Of course, this is according to Plutarch. The game in question is assumed to be Senet, unknown to Plutarch.

A scene from the movie Det sjunde inseglet (1956)*, by Ingmar Bergman.*
Here we see how the knight plays Chess with Death, in order to win time.

Senet was used in the funerary rites for "gambling" on one's soul entering unharmed into the other world. The deceased played against the "invisible opponent", against the gods, in order to grant the passage of his soul. We can find another example where Seton Kamois, the son of Ramses II, plays Senet with the dead in order to be able to read a powerful cursed book. Therefore, in Senet, death and gambling seem to go together. The stakes were high as the whole afterlife was in play. The player, through the board game of Senet, assured the mobility of his *ba*, allowing its migration to the other world (PICCIONE, P. in FINKEL, I. 2007: 59-60). As Caillois summarizes: *"Le défunt joue son sort dans l'autre monde et gagne ou perd l'éternité bienheureuse"* (CAILLOIS, R. 1967: 6).

In the same way, the game Liubo is also seen in a Heavenly or divine environment, being played by immortals, as if it were some kind of divine game. There are many representations of these "divine players" playing Liubo

In fact, both King Zhao of the Qin and Emperor Wu of the Han are both said to have contested the game with immortals (MACKENZIE, C. in MACKENZIE, C. & FINKEL, I. 2004: 122). In other stories, ambitious mortals seek to play with spirits or celestial powers to obtain superhuman powers from them. In one of these stories, a *Shang* king made a statue to represent the Heavenly spirit. Then, he played Liubo against it with one of his subjects making the moves for the statue. When the spirit was defeated, the king insulted it. King Zhao ordered artisans to climb Mount Hua and there make giant *bo* (throwing sticks) from the trunks of trees. Afterward he wrote an inscription stating: "King Zhao once played *bo* against a heavenly spirit here". In another story, a bold youth challenged the deity of an earth-god shrine to a game of Liubo. Should he win, he would borrow the god's power for three days, while if he lost the god could make him suffer. With his left hand, he threw the dice for the god and with his right hand, for himself. In this way, he won the match and borrowed the power, but did not return it. After three days, the god went to find him, and the grove round the shrine dried and died (LEWIS, ME. 2006: 280-281).