



Comparing play and toys from
Greco-Roman antiquity with
traditional play and toys
from rural North Africa

Jean-Pierre Rossie

Associated member of Locus Ludi

sanatoyplay@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

Is it possible and useful to compare the tangible and intangible play cultures of Greco-Roman antiquity and of the North African and Saharan rural world, two worlds separated by so many centuries and differentiated by natural and human environments, beliefs, customs and specific social organizations? In developing this working document I started from the assumption that it could be possible and following the analysis of the differences and similarities of play activities and toys and their material and sociocultural context I noticed several affinities proven both by literary descriptions and by images (see the PowerPoint related to this theme).

Can we sometimes speak of continuity? If in Antiquity there were contacts between the Greco-Roman civilization and the Amazigh (Berber) civilization, then between the Muslim world and the Christian world both in North Africa, in the East and in the Iberian Peninsula, continuity or direct influence was possible but cannot exceed the level of hypothesis because the evidence seems to be lacking. However, the interest of the comparison also lies in the way in which each culture has transformed this heritage over time according to religious and societal changes.

As a sociocultural anthropologist specializing in childhood and North African and Saharan play cultures, I would like to submit this comparison between the games and toys of rural children from North Africa and the Sahara and those of Greco-Roman children to archaeologists of Antiquity, hoping that this could offer them some leads for reflection.

Véronique Dasen rightly underlines that toys have a cultural dimension which must be patiently reconstructed (Dasen, 2011, p. 53). Nevertheless, it must be taken into account that the games and toys preserved from Greco-Roman Antiquity rather refer to children of the elite, where the games and toys of North African and Saharan children come from children of popular milieus. Literary and archaeological information on play and toys of Antiquity highlights the point of view of adults on the play activities of adults, adolescents and sometimes girls and boys. On the contrary, the information on children's play and toys from North Africa and the Sahara, relating to the 20th and early 21st century, comes from my ethnographic research or from that of other authors, relates exclusively to the play activities of children and favors their point of view.

This essay it is mainly about Greek Antiquity and to a lesser extent Roman Antiquity. The information on ancient games and toys comes from a limited number of publications, in particular the catalogue *Ludique ! Jouer dans l'Antiquité* (2019) and the journals *Les dossiers d'archéologie* (1992, 168), *Archéothéma. Histoire et archéologie* (2013, 31) and *Archéologia* (2017, 553; 2018, 571). A subsequent analysis of other publications on this topic may increase and adapt this data. Information on children's games and toys from the rural North African and Saharan world comes mainly from the Amazigh (Berber) populations, especially from the Anti-Atlas region in south-west Morocco, and from the Ghrib of the Tunisian Sahara. These data can be found in the volumes of the collection *Saharan and North African Toy and Play Cultures* (1).

In the first part I discuss the main differences between the games and toys of Greco-Roman Antiquity and the games and toys of children from rural North Africa and the Sahara. In the second part, the similarities are analyzed. The conclusion attempts to highlight the results of this first comparative effort.

Populations, regions and periods concerned

Populations of Greco-Roman Antiquity

- Ancient Greek world from the 5th to the 3rd century BC (Attica, Evia (Euboea), Sicily, southern Italy...)
- Roman Empire from the 3rd to the 4th century AD (Aventicum, Lugdunum, Rome, Tarragona...)

Saharan populations

- Populations of the Niger River region, Mali, between 100 BC and 1980
- The Moors of the city of Oualata, Mauritania, from the 1930s
- The Ghrib of the Tunisian Sahara, a small semi-nomadic population in the 1970s

Moroccan populations

- Amazigh (Berber) population of the Rif, early 1900s

- Amazigh population of the Anti-Atlas, the High Atlas and the Middle Atlas, 1992-2019
- Sedentary population of the Moroccan Sahara, early 2000s
- Population of the cities Essaouira, Kénitra, Marrakech, Midelt, 1992-2008

DIFFERENCES

1. GREEK ANTIQUITY

The collection of information on games and toys in Greek and Roman Antiquity clearly highlights **the point of view of adults**. Written sources offer discussions from adults, especially philosophers, about how adults and sometimes adolescents or children play or should play and what toys are suitable. Another source is based on archaeologists' finds in children's graves, of votive deposits in shrines or on paintings of objects sometimes hastily called toys. More recently, these 'toys' are often considered as objects with ritual and religious function (Huysecom-Haxhi, S. & Muller, A., 2015, p. 323), but even if these objects had a ritual and religious function, they can also refer to toys with which young people have played in a secular context. Information on Greek and Roman Antiquity rarely offers a description based on the observation of spontaneous play activities and the photos I have used in the PowerPoint mainly show adults.

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

The analysis of the play culture of North African and Saharan children results from the observation of spontaneous play activities supplemented by free interviews with children, adolescents and sometimes adults. Thanks to this research method, **the point of view of children** is favored. What I mention in my publications and with the photographs incorporated therein is certainly based on personal choices. However, when I describe the play and toy-making activities of children in North Africa and the Sahara, I try as much as possible to offer the reader information based on what the children are doing and how they talk about it. Photographing spontaneous play events demonstrates this method, an approach which, since 2002 and in the Anti-Atlas, has become easier thanks to Khalija Jariaa (Tiznit) and Boubaker Daoumani (Sidi Ifni), two collaborators to my research who were born and live in this region.

A Hellenist asked me what I meant by “spontaneous children's play” (Vespa M., email of 27.9.2019). Surely, the expression ‘spontaneous play’ must be specified and I will define it, in the context of my research on play, games and toys of rural North African and the Saharan children, as play and toy-making activities initiated and organized by the children themselves without the intervention of adults but sometimes under the tutelage of an older child who can be at the same time the leader of the playgroup. The play activity itself can therefore be spontaneous but this does not mean that each child who participates in it personally chooses what, when, where and with whom to play.

2. GREEK ANTIQUITY

Children's games and toys in Greek Antiquity mainly refer to the situation of **children of the elite**.

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

The games and toys of North African and Saharan children that I have analyzed come mainly from **popular class children**.

3. GREEK ANTIQUITY

In Antiquity, **the border between play and divination was often impossible to draw**. Ancient divinatory processes can be related to entertainments, such as dice or knucklebones, which are sometimes used for games of skill and competition but on other occasions, serve to predict the future. Whatever the objective, to win over an opponent or to know their fate, the gods are responsible for the move that determines the way in which the dice or the astragals fall, this way fixing success or failure (Dasen & Schädler, 2017, p. 60). Yet, when reading the ancient sources it is quite rare to find children playing dice in the Greco-Roman world. In written and figurative sources, the activity of *kubeia* is especially attested for adults (M. Vespa, mail 10.9.2019).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

I did **not find any trace of a link between play and divination** with regard to the games of skill and competition of Saharan and North African children who in addition do not use dice for their games for all I know. However, **in their pretend games a relation to religion, ceremonies or rites sometimes exists**.

4. GREEK ANTIQUITY

Ancient play culture is a largely intangible heritage (2), especially with regard to children (Dasen, 2019a, p. 24).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

Both the intangible and the tangible aspects are of great importance in the games and toys of Saharan and North African children. The creation of toys and the use of play materials are directly related to make-believe play and games of skill. Materials of mineral, vegetable, animal and rarely human origin (e.g. hair) are used.

5. GREEK ANTIQUITY

The preserved objects called ‘dolls’ do not seem to be toys in the modern sense, but rather ‘anthropomorphic votive offerings’, with articulated members, linked to the maturation and socialization of girls and **absent from ordinary scenes of children's games** (Dasen, 2005, p. 67). Most of the ‘dolls’ were probably mass produced by adults in workshops specializing in the production of terracotta figurines (3). Clay dolls have been found in tombs and shrines. These figurines were to be used as toys, but could also be dedicated to deities during rites marking the transition from childhood to adulthood (Massar, 2019, p. 40).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

Female and sometimes male dolls are figurines created by children, especially girls. They are almost only used in make-believe play. Nevertheless, there existed or sometimes exist two exceptional situations in which **a doll played or rarely plays a ritual role: when imploring for rain in time of drought and during Ashura**, the festive ten days period at the beginning of the Muslim year.

6. GREEK ANTIQUITY

Among the so-called dolls of Greek Antiquity I have so far **only seen female figures**. The ‘dolls’ of young boys exist but are rare and their production limited in time (late V-IV century).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

The dolls of North African and Saharan girls mainly represent women, sometimes men, children and babies. Boys' dolls mostly represent men, rarely women.

7. GREEK ANTIQUITY

Greek dolls do not represent secular toys but the means of educating the girl child or young girl (Dasen, 2005, p. 70).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

The dolls of North African and Saharan children are almost only secular toys. They are not used to educate girls or boys but are created by them to stage situations related to the adult world. However, these dolls and the games in which they are used certainly have an aspect of instruction in the life of adults, a learning by the child himself and by the intervention of older children.

8. GREEK-ROMAN ANTIQUITY

The numphê (doll) has articulated arms which undoubtedly made it possible to dress it easily with clothes that are no longer there. (Dasen, 2017).

Hellenistic dolls with movable members (Dasen, 2019a, p. 40).

Roman dolls with movable members ((Dasen, 2019a, p. 46).

“For girls there were dolls, which were **usually made of terracotta...** Others were **fashioned as though nude, and without lower legs or arms, so that they could be dressed and undressed by the child.**” (Beaumont, 1994, p. 31-32).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

I have not encountered dolls with moving limbs. The clothes of these dolls are very varied and range from simple to very elaborate. The dolls representing *tislit* or *arusa* – meaning bride in Amazigh or Arabic language – are well dressed with preferably a shiny tracksuit and possibly a beautiful hairstyle (4).

SIMILARITIES

9. GREEK ANTIQUITY

Children also received gifts at other celebrations, such as the ‘Diasia’, celebrated in honor of Zeus Meilichios. (Dasen, 2011, p. 55). The Diasia were happening in Athens but there is insufficient information to be able to extend this practice of giving gifts to children in rest of the Greek world (M. Vespa, email 27.9.2019).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

It is especially during the festival of Ashura, celebrated during the first ten days of the first month of the Muslim year, that **Moroccan children from popular class backgrounds receive toys** (water syringe, tambourine, drum, flute), sweets and clothes from their parents and other adults. At another celebration, the *Mulud* or celebration of the birth of the Prophet Mohamed, a small windmill is traditionally given to children.

10. GREEK ANTIQUITY

According to Plato, **during the first six years, the child has the right to play regardless of gender** (Dasen, 2005, p. 62). Although this is a philosophical observation ((M. Vespa, mail 27.9.2019) more than an observed reality, I think it is close enough to the habits of Greek parents of this period to be able to compare.

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

There is no separation between play activities of girls and boys until the age of primary school but that does not mean that it is inexistent at a younger age. Already around the age of three, the awareness of the difference between girl games and boy games exist, for example with regard to playing with dolls. A striking example is that of a four-year-old boy from Sidi Ifni who, when his six-year-old niece tells him three times to go ‘cook food’ for the dolls, refuses, shouting “I am a man, not a woman!” and then repeats it insistently (Rossie & Daoumani, 2004).

11. GREEK ANTIQUITY

Several types of rattles were common in Antiquity as evidenced by finds, images and texts. On a mid-5th century BC Attic *chous* or jug, a toddler is sitting on his pot, surrounded by a stick on wheels and a vase, brandishing a rattle. The rattle (in Greek *platagônion* and in latin *crepitaculum*) is one of the earliest toys for children (Dasen, 2019a, p. 14, 32-33).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

Mothers, grandmothers and other women made rattles for babies, in rabbit skin or with small round bottles in which water was brought from the sacred spring Zamzam in Mecca. In Tamazight the rattle is called *tagharghucht*, a term linked to the sound made by the rattle. Today plastic rattles are bought although mothers complain about their poor quality.

12. GREEK ANTIQUITY

From the age of three, the child is allowed to walk freely and go out to play outside the gynaeceum (Dasen, 2005, p. 63). However, this statement, which is found in texts of political philosophy such as the *Republic* of Plato, does not always represent everyday reality in Athens (M. Vespa, mail 10.9.2019).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

A three-year-old is normally encouraged to get out of the entourage of the women and the little ones and to go play with other children his age as well as with his older sisters, brothers and neighbors.

13. GREEK ANTIQUITY

The games also reflect the common interests of young children of both sexes. On the *choés* (small wine jugs), most of the entertainment diversifies in masculine and feminine. Girls and boys wave rattles, throw balls or nuts, have fun with animals. (Dasen, 2005, p. 65).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

Games and toys for babies and toddlers are little differentiated between girls and boys. From the age of three, this separation between play activities for girls and play activities for boys is gradually imposed to become well pronounced around the age of six. However, this opposition cannot be seen as absolute because there are always exceptions.

14. GREEK ANTIQUITY

Children therefore played alone, with other rules than adults, which they invented spontaneously. In Plato's *Laws* (793e-794a), he observes that the taste for fun is natural in children from the age of three, and that they make up games as soon as they are together (Dasen, 2019a, p. 24).

There are also texts describing ancient episodes concerning Socrates or the king of Sparta Agesilaus, or even Archytas of Tarentum. These characters (but also Heraclitus) are protagonists of anecdotes where they play with children. See the article by V. Dasen on the "hochet d'Archytas" (2017b) (Vespa M., email of 10.9.2019).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

Adults rarely interfere in children's games after they play outside with other children their age or older. When they intervene, this rarely concerns the play activity itself, but their reaction is mainly caused by a disturbance, a danger, the

nonfulfillment of a domestic obligation or the breach of a moral or social rule caused by the playing.

With regard to these episodes in Antiquity in which particular adults like to play with children, I wonder if these are not exceptional cases put forward for reasons of argument.

15. GREEK ANTIQUITY

Ancient sources do not directly offer us the voice of children; ancient texts and representations allow us to approach their universe through the eyes of adults and rare biographical accounts. Thanks to archaeological discoveries, we have some objects that belonged to these children. **The toys that have come down to us are mostly made of terracotta or metal, but they should not make us forget those that were made of perishable material (wood, straw, cloth, wax, leather, bread crumbs...)** (Dasen, 2011, p. 53).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

It is in these **perishable materials** that most of the toys created by North African and Saharan children were made and are still made today in some regions. The use of **clay or rather clay soil** to model toys is still popular in the villages of the Anti-Atlas, mainly for girls and less for boys. **Metal toys**, on the other hand, are rather made by boys with recycled material.

16. GREEK ANTIQUITY

Children often had fun making (toys) for themselves, as Lucien reports: Isn't that how in our country children take wax or clay, knead it, and give successively to the same mass a thousand different figures (1)? [1. Lucien de Samosate, *Alcyon*, 4, dans *Œuvres complètes*, trad. Eugène Talbot. Paris : Hachette, 1857]. (Dasen, 2011, p. 53).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

Creating clay toys in the Moroccan Anti-Atlas requires skill passed down from generation to generation in playgroups for girls and more rarely for boys. It is not only a question of finding the suitable earth and filtering it, of preparing the modeling clay, but also of modeling animal or human figurines, utensils and furniture, of drying these toys and sometimes baking them in the oven of a mother or in an oven built by the girls. Regarding these play activities, the collaboration between an archaeologist, myself and my two collaborators made possible the analysis of the making of clay toys by children of the Anti-Atlas, a study incorporated into the archaeologist's doctoral thesis (Fassoulas, 2017).

The ethnographic part of this thesis will be published in Rossie et al, (forthcoming) *Saharan and North African Toy and Play Cultures. Make-believe play among Amazigh children of the Moroccan Anti-Atlas*.

17. GREEK ANTIQUITY

A great variety of dolls have come down to us from Antiquity. **The most modest, made of linen fabric stuffed with rags, and papyrus**, were sometimes preserved in the dry climate of Roman and Coptic Egypt. (Dasen, 2011, p. 56).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

North African and Saharan dolls created by girls and sometimes boys often have a **rigid frame of reeds or twigs put together in the shape of a cross** or they are **modeled in clay** or rather in clay soil.

18. GREEK ANTIQUITY

The ‘dolls’ represent adolescent girls and women and relate mostly to marriage and fertility (Dasen, 2005, p. 69).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

Most dolls created by girls represent adolescent girls and women and are often used for make-believe play related to marriage ceremonies and the life of a spouse; less often to pregnancy and the birth of a baby. They are also used for dinner and household play.

19. GREEK ANTIQUITY

In Greek the terms for ‘dolls’ are *numphê* ‘**the future bride or bride who has not yet given birth**’, and *korê*, *korokosmion* or *kosmion*, translated as ‘doll’ (Dasen, 2005, p. 67).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

The term for dolls in rural North Africa and the Sahara is **in Amazigh (Berber) *tislit* for the female doll and *isli* for the male doll or in Arabic *arousa* and *arîs***. In real life, *tislit* or *arousa* are the names given to the bride and *isli* or *arîs* to the bridegroom during the period of marriage ceremonies.

20. GREEK ANTIQUITY

Some figurines explicitly refer to nuptial rites, such as the terracotta doll seated on a high back seat (Dasen, 2017).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

The games of make-believe related to the wedding ceremonies and feast, especially with regard to the bride and sometimes also the bridegroom, are very much in favor among North African and Saharan girls. In these play activities certain ceremonies such as applying henna and the departure from the house of the bride to the house of the bridegroom are staged as well as the preparation of food and the banquet.

21. GREEK ANTIQUITY

“But with figurines and a few resembling objects, he built **a bridal chamber, tinkered a young husband and putted at his side a young bride.** After having inflated the belly of the figurine representing the spouse with stuffing, he imagines that she is pregnant, and, suddenly, here are the pains of childbirth, the childbirth, the midwife and her fees.” (Dasen, 2019a, p. 25, in translation).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

This description of playing with dolls is very similar to some doll play of girls from North Africa and the Sahara, both for the dolls used and for the staged situations.

22. GREEK ANTIQUITY

The playful practices transpose into a virtual universe the prelude to romantic relationships and the preparations for marriage, the relationship that is created between the spouses. (Dasen, 2017).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

Although I think that I cannot find an example of a pretend game of girls from these regions that refers to a romantic relationship, I know **a lot of make-believe play staging the preparations for the wedding, the wedding party, the situation of a wife and a mother and some games that refer to” the relationship between spouses.**

23. GREEK ANTIQUITY

The ancient ‘dolls’ were probably never mere secular toys, but offered a means of educating the little girl. Some play with rattlers as a participant in religious festivals or sit enthroned like a bride on the day of her marriage, others introduce the girl to her future role as wife and mother. (Dasen, 2011, p. 56).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

With their female dolls the girls of North Africa and the Sahara imitate and interpret, yesterday as today, **the life of a wife and a mother** although pretending to have a wedding party is probably the most popular doll play. Baby dolls, mother dolls with a baby on their back and little child dolls exist but are quite rare. These games undoubtedly serve to 'educate the girl' but this wish does not come from the adults. **On the contrary, this instruction through play takes concrete form in playgroups through the intervention of older girls and the will of the small girls themselves.**

24. GREEK ANTIQUITY

The Greeks and the Romans had already designed real rooms or doll's kitchens for their children. **Simpler utensils for dinner play modeled in clay are also found in large numbers.** (Durand, 1992, p. 16).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

Miniature utensils and furniture for dinner play such as those of children of the Greek and Roman elites are not found among popular class children in North Africa and the Sahara. On the other hand, these children create countless **toy utensils and furniture with natural material, especially clay or clay soil, and waste material.** These play activities, which are most often girls' games, are played outside in playhouses whose ground plan is delineated by stones and sometimes by walls of wet sand.

25. GRECO-ROMAN ANTIQUITY

For the period of late Antiquity in the Roman East, in Fayoum in Egypt, the miniature furniture of certain tombs included the doll's wardrobe and various toys, such as a balloon, **small weaving instruments** or even dishes (Behling, 2013, p. 18).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

Both in 1975 among the Ghrib of the Tunisian Sahara and in 2007 in the Moroccan Anti-Atlas, girls **built a toy loom** on which it was really possible to weave. In the case of a Ghrib girl around ten years old, her mother came to check on the state of the toy loom and adjusted some warp threads.

26. GRECO-ROMAN ANTIQUITY

Little clay animals – dogs, pigs, tortoises, birds – kept the small child amused... (Beaumont, 1994, p. 31). This very strong link can explain the presence of **terracotta statuettes of animals** in the graves of children in the Greek and Roman world. It cannot be excluded that children manipulated them as play figures, but their function seems to be above all symbolic. (Vespa, 2019, p. 27).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

In the Anti-Atlas children like to model a whole **series of animals in clay soil**, preferably during rainy periods because then clay soil is more manageable. Especially girls sometimes bake them in their mother's bread oven or in ovens that they build themselves. These toy animals are used in make-believe play depicting the lives of animals and adults.

27. GRECO-ROMAN ANTIQUITY

In Aristophanes' *The Clouds*, Strepsiade describes the variety of these forever lost toys: "He was still very small, no higher than that, **he modeled houses**, sculpted boats, built small leather carts..." The little Romans are also doing this, as Horace testifies: "**they build small houses**, harness mice to a small cart, play an even or odd pair and ride a horse on a long reed." (Dasen, 2011, p. 53, 55).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

Delimiting the ground plan of a small house with stones or wet sand is a common play activity in rural Morocco as in the Tunisian Sahara. Girls often do this for their doll and dinner games. Boys sometimes do this for make-believe play related to male occupations. Exceptional houses were created by maidservants of the Moors of Oualata in the 1930s. They are **miniature terracotta houses** without roofs but with several rooms whose walls are decorated with geometric patterns. Miniature utensils, furniture and animals in terracotta accompany these houses.

28. GRECO-ROMAN ANTIQUITY

A **kind of cymbal** appears to have been a split reed or cane, which clattered when shaken with the hand. These cymbals were used by women (Smith, 1873, p. 107). **Another cymbal model consists of two concave shaped brass discs** and a leather strap to hold them with the thumb and middle finger (Museum of Ancient Greek Technology).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

The first type of cymbal was made by Ghrib children from the Tunisian Sahara in 1975 to provide rhythm for their songs or to have fun. This cymbal is produced by taking a palm branch which is split in two over two thirds of its length and with the last third serving as a handle.

In the Anti-Atlas **the second type of cymbal** is sometimes constructed with four can bottoms cut out with a knife. In the center of each bottom two holes are drilled to attach a piece of wire into which the thumb and forefinger of each hand will enter. Once the cymbals are ready the child can use them as castanets.

29. GREEK ANTIQUITY

The tambourine. This percussion instrument (called *rhoptron*) was mainly used by the Corybantes (ritual dancers). It consisted of a wooden hoop forming a thin cylinder, generally covered on one face with a membrane of stretched skin. On the circumference of the hoop, small hammered bronze discs (cymbals) were inserted in pairs in notches, making a rattling sound when the musician struck the tambourine with his hand. Standing, he held the drum in his left hand and struck it with the tips of his right fingers. (Museum of Ancient Greek Technology). A woman playing the tambourine is seen on an Agrigento vase from around 350 BC (Bellia, 2013, p. 94).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

One of the gifts traditionally given to girls during the Ashura festival at the start of the Muslim year is the **goat skin tambourine with or without metal rings**. This tambourine is still played as in Antiquity. According to tradition, boys had to be given a small pottery drum but since the late 1900s and early 2000s I have seen girls occasionally playing these little drums made of pottery.

30. GREEK ANTIQUITY

“Greeks played a variety of wind instruments they classified as aulos (reeds) or syrinx (flutes)” (Campbell, Greated & Myers, 2004, p. 83). **The aulos** “consisted of a cylindrical pipe (of cane, boxwood, bone (mainly the tibia of a deer), ivory, wood (mainly lotus), copper or their combination) and by a bulbous wooden mouthpiece... The reed was fitted onto the mouthpiece. **The single-reed type was achieved with a lateral cut along the side of a small cane** (one end of which was closed) so that it created a thin blade which was excited and beat by blowing (as in the modern clarinet). The holes of the aulos were usually seven, with an additional one towards the end for the production of another octave... **The ‘aulete’ (musician) placed the mouthpiece on his lips**

(**with the reed completely enclosed by his mouth**) and skilfully blew with force, pressing his lips suitably and covering the corresponding holes with his fingers producing the desired notes.” (Museum of Ancient Greek Technology).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

In 1975 in the Tunisian Sahara, I saw how a 14-year-old Ghrib boy **carefully cut the reed for his 5-hole flute**. Then he showed me how to play on this flute **by putting the reed entirely in his mouth** and placing his lips delicately on the mouthpiece of the flute, just like an ancient Greek flautist did.

31. GREEK ANTIQUITY

“The pandoura (trichord). It was **a wooden three-stringed instrument** with a small soundbox and a long neck with frets for the production of different notes from each string (by the fluctuation of its palpitating length). It is the direct predecessor of the contemporary instruments in the lute family. It has survived until today with the name “tambouras”... The player (usually a woman) held the pandoura horizontally with the neck of the instrument to the left. The left hand fingers pressed the strings on the frets and the right hand plucked the strings or struck them with the plectrum.” (Museum of Ancient Greek Technology).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

The *lotar*, a **traditional three-string guitar**, made in 2007 by a thirteen-year-old boy from the Moroccan Pre-Sahara, was created with a goat skin stretched over an old pan and a long wooden stick with three keys at the top. With this lotar, which looks pretty much like the ancient pandoura, he practices to become a professional musician.

32. GREEK ANTIQUITY

The Greek and Latin words for the hoop are associated with circular rotation as well as speed, suggesting rapid movement and running. It is operated at greater or lesser speed by means of a rod, straight or with a curved end. The player's hand can be used to control the hoop. Only one Greek author provided details on the size and appearance of the hoops used in training young men: It should be smaller than a man's diameter and reach his chest. The hoop is made of degradable organic materials, for example pieces of willow or recycled objects like metal strips from a barrel or a wheel tire. The use of a hoop is reserved for boys who train in Greece in the gymnasium or in Rome on the Field of Mars in sports competitions for the elite youth. (Dasen, 2018b, p. 2, 3, 5, 8; Dasen, 2019b, p. 54-55).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

The hoop is a boy's game called *akharkhar* in Amazigh, a word whose meaning seems unknown, or *derrija* in Moroccan Arabic, a term also used for bicycles. The hoop used in Sidi Ifni was a hoop of an old barrel or a bicycle or moped wheel without a tire. In a similar way to the boys in Antiquity, the boys of the Anti-Atlas pushed their hoop slowly or at full speed in front of them by applying to the outside of the hoop an iron rod which ends with a hook or a stick pressed into the opening of a flattened plastic bottle. The boys preferred to use a flattened plastic bottle for the sound it produced when pushing the hoop. It was done in the streets and on hard dirt roads. This game was often played in a group of boys aged around eight and more, but it was very rare to make it a competition. Today playing with a hoop rarely occurs in the coastal town Sidi Ifni but this still happens in the surrounding villages.

33. GREEK ANTIQUITY

In the 2nd century AD, the lexicographer Pollux explains that **the favorite game of young girls is called the *pentelitha* or game of “five stones”** (Onomasticon, IX, 126). As is still the case today, the five knucklebones are thrown into the air and then caught on the back of the hand (5). Those which fall to the ground are picked up with the fingers of the same hand, **without dropping those already lying on the back of the hand**. (Dasen & Schädler, 2017, p. 63). This game so often played by children and young girls was played sitting or kneeling (Dasen, 2018a, p. 43).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

Among the Aït Baamran of the village Lahfart in the province of Sidi Ifni, where Tachelhit is spoken, this game is called *ighmayn* (origin unknown). In Moroccan Arabic its name is *khamayïssa* (the five), **the game of the five stones**. Children start practicing it around the age of five but adults and elderly women continue to play it. **This game is more often played by girls but also boys enjoy it and sometimes also a mixed group**. The play material is limited to five small more or less round and fairly smooth stones. Sometimes nuts found in ripe argan fruit is used instead. In two villages in the province of Tiznit, girls and boys use two different objects to play the game of five stones: the round stones found in the wadi (seasonal river), which are the best to use for this game, and the knuckles from sheep legs. The squatting position of the girls and the way of throwing up and receiving on the back of the hand the five stones are similar to the game in Antiquity. If one or more stones fall on the ground, the player must give the five stones to the next player. Girls from the Lahfart

Mountain village say there are about twenty-seven levels to play with the five stones, but it is rare to reach the last level.

34. GREEK ANTIQUITY

Three young girls are crouching around a circle drawn on the ground, divided by lines, with three knucklebones placed in the center. They probably play the **game of *eisomilla* or *omilla*** (“**in the circle**”), the objective of which is to dislodge the bones of opponents out of this space by throwing one’s own. This game is still popular today in Turkey and the Middle East. (Carè, 2019, p. 92).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

A similar **game in a circle**, but at the same time different in several aspects, is played in the Anti-Atlas. Each player must find an even number of shells (ten or more). A player draws a circle and the elder collects all the shells and throws them up to scatter them in the circle. He now begins to draw with his little finger a line between two shells sufficiently distant but without touching a shell. To win, he must with a flick on a shell, but without touching another one, touch the second shell. If he succeeds, he wins one of the two shells. The elder player may continue to play as long as he does not touch the other shell of the chosen pair or another shell with his hand. If he makes one of these mistakes, he must give way to the next player. These rules count for each player. Once it is the turn of the next player he must take all the shells remaining in the circle and start playing like the first player did (Daoumani, 2019).

35. GREEK ANTIQUITY

The drawbar cart is the exclusive toy of boys (Dasen, 2005, p. 67) although there are some examples of girls using such a cart. In Greece, this drawbar cart (hamax) was the boys' favorite toy. On painted vases and on funerary steles, it figures as their attribute par excellence. The simplest model seems to consist of a wooden rod attached to an axle with one or two wheels. (Dasen, 2011, p. 55).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

The cart with one or two wheels is made by the boys and pushed in front of them. I have not seen girls playing with a cart like this, but it is quite possible that sometimes a girl wanted to push a cart her brother or a neighbor made.

36. GREEK ANTIQUITY

Episkyros or ‘common ball’: “**the players divided into two opposing sides had to intercept the ball thrown by their opponent and throw it again,** without ever moving back beyond the back lines delimiting the field, otherwise they would lose the game.” (Hasselin Rous, 2019, p. 57). The playing field is split in half with lime or stone, called *skyros*, hence the name of the game, with two lines marking the goals. The objective is to throw the ball as far as possible into the opponent's field in order to cross the goal line without being intercepted by the opponents. (Vespa, 2019, p. 125; see also Costanza, 2019, p. 120-121). ‘**Game of the sky**’, *ouranos*: a player throws the ball towards the sky and the opponent must recover it before it falls on the ground (Vespa, 2019, p. 125; see also Costanza, 2019, p. 125-126).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

To play this **ball game, called ‘the cat of the sky’**, a group of five or more boys gathers in a field outside the houses. Together they create the ball for this game. It is a piece of wood that is wrapped in rags and securely fastened. A start and end line limit the large play area. **All boys line up on the start line. The tallest one throws the ball to the sky and everyone runs to catch it. Whoever catches the ball must immediately throw it into the sky until a player arrives with the ball at the end of the line.** The latter is the winner of the game. Now, the end line becomes the start line and the winner restarts the game by throwing the ball up to the sky (Daoumani, 2019).

37. GREEK ANTIQUITY

As mentioned above (36) a game of throwing a ball in the air and catching it before it fell back to the ground existed in Greek Antiquity. **Other ball games existed** but, it seems, mainly ball games with the hand (Hasselin Rous, 2019, p. 56-57; Durand, 1992, p. 13).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

A similar game of throwing a ball to the sky was played in the Moroccan Anti-Atlas in 2012 (see 36). However, **traditional ball games** seem to have lost much of their appeal to North African and Saharan children and **they are replaced by football with little or no rules.**

38. GREEK ANTIQUITY

Hockey. It was probably a hobby of Greek aristocratic youth taking place in a palaestra. Attic bas-relief. 510-500 BC (André, 1992, p. 39). This game is similar to the North African ball game played with curved sticks.

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

In 2002-2003 in the Tafilalt in Morocco a researcher observed the ritual to obtain rain to which is linked the *takurt*, **a ball game using a curved stick...** This is a very old North Africa game related to rites of imploring rain. Generally the game consists for two opposing sides striking a ball using curved sticks, or fighting for the ball until it falls in a hole prepared to receive it. (Gélard, 2006, § summary, § 25).

Although women from a Moroccan village in the Tiznit region walked around their doll, created with a large ladle, in order to implore rain during a drought in 2007, the ball game with curved sticks was not mentioned in this context.

39. ROMAN ANTIQUITY

Game of marbles from Roman Antiquity, the playing areas or tracks of which are quite often found, are described as follows: We observe an astonishing uniformity between these tracks (for marbles) found in Rome, in the cities of North Africa and those of Asia Minor (Turkey). They are rectangular tracks whose dimensions vary according to the surface on which they are engraved ... Such tracks consists of a variable number of bowls of approximately 4 to 10 cm in diameter ... We can therefore suspect that the players launched their marbles from the area of the two lines with the aim of making it reach the last bowl while preventing it from falling into the other holes (Schädler, 2013, p. 55). We are very poorly informed about these ball games. Rather, it is a hypothesis based on archaeological data.

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

In Morocco, the **game of marbles** played over the past ten years is different from that described for Roman Antiquity. My rare observations of the game of marbles are limited to the game in which a player must try to touch an opponent's marble by projecting with his thumb the marble he is holding in his index finger. So far my information does not mention the tracing or drawing of geometric shapes for the game of marbles. In North Africa the games of Antiquity in which you have to throw small objects towards a container or a hole are commonly found.

40. GREEK ANTIQUITY

“**The top**, in its simplest form, that which is operated manually, by rotating the object ... in essence it is an object generally made of wood or terracotta, endowed with a point”. The spinning top called ‘sabot’ (hoof) “is a top to which the rotational movement is given by a string, wrapped around the object, unwound with force to give the first movement, and then revived with continuous striking with the string” (Lambrugo, 2013, p. 30). The top “is only thrown once and stops spinning as soon as it has no momentum” (Durand, 1992, p. 15).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

In the 1980s boys and girls of the Anti-Atlas played in the 1980s with a **simple top** made with an argan thorn put through an apricot nut. You have to rub the top and bottom of the nut on a hard stone until you get a small hole on both sides but one a little wider than the other. The two holes should be right in the middle of the nut. In these two holes the argan thorn or a small piece of wood is introduced. By taking the narrowest part in hand and turning the thorn or the small wood vigorously, you can rotate this top at full speed. In the 1990s I noticed the replacement of the nut with a bottle cap in which a cross-shaped opening is cut and through which a small piece of wood is pushed. Some fruits could also be used as spinning tops. A **‘hoof’ type spinning top** that was very difficult to make is that made of clay. This type of spinning top, used mainly by Moroccan boys in towns and villages, are traditionally made of wood by craftsmen. I have never seen striking this top with a string to make it run longer. Over the decades, these children have invented many types of spinning tops made from waste material.

41. GREEK ANTIQUITY

The rocking plank is used for a Greek game of skill and equilibrium.

Another form of swing, of the ‘escarpolette’ type (*aïora* in Greek), is suspended by ropes. The seat sometimes takes the form of a stool or even a seat (Dasen, 2019a, p. 60-61).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

In the Aït Baamran region, **the swing** is called: *ajgûgel*, *allayg*, *hawlilla* or *ahlullu*. Children look for a piece of wood that will stand up to use and often wrap it with rags to make it more comfortable to sit on. A long rope brought from the house is thrown over a beam or branch. Now you have to attach the two ends of the rope to the two sides of the seat, and swing yourself by walking

back and forth or else allow another child to push you on the swing. This game is regularly used by girls and boys who sell cactus fruits along a road to have fun while waiting for customers. Parents sometimes help their children to mount the swing to make sure it is working properly (Daoumani, 2019).

42. GREEK ANTIQUITY

According to Minucius Felix, an author from the 3rd century AD, children loved playing games. He describes the game of boys on the beach of Ostia as follows: Children... had fun **throwing pebbles into the sea**. This game consists of picking up a pebble of rounded shape, polished by the beat of the waves. Then, holding it horizontally between the fingers one leans as close as possible to the ground and makes the pebble rotate on itself on the surface of the water. The pebble must either stay level with the surface of the sea and surf by gliding with a gentle movement, or else shave the tops of the waves, to resurface and spring up, raised by repeated leaps. Among the children, he was the winner whose pebble ran the furthest and made the greatest number of ricochets. (Dasen 2019a, p. 25).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

In the 1980s Boubaker Daoumani and his friends **threw pebbles on the water** as described for Greek Antiquity. It was done near Sidi Ifni beach where they went to a small lake filled with sea water or rain. This temporary lake is located at the place where the wadi sometimes throws itself into the sea near the mausoleum of the marabout Sidi Ali Ifni. Only daring boys came to this place, not young children or girls. This was done to have fun and appreciate the skill of the players, but without competition.

43. GREEK ANTIQUITY

A board game like those incised in the western part of the Parthenon colonnade. These are strategy games, like the *polis* or *poleis* game, the objective of which is to capture the opponent's pawns by isolating them or by encircling them on two sides. The Roman version of the *polis* or *poleis* is the very popular *ludus latrunculorum* or 'game of the little soldiers'. Many copies have been preserved on different media. The board consisted of a variable number of boxes, usually 8×8 , and each player had a proportional number of pawns (Dasen, 2017, p. 37).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

For **the game of three on a line**, one of the two players draws a square, divides it into four similar squares, then draws two diagonals in the large square. Each player brings three stones or three shells or other small items. The pawns of the first player are placed on the two angles and the middle of an edge of the large square and the second player places his pawns on the opposite edge in the same way. The two players agree on who will start to move a pawn according to the rules defined below.

1. The player must move one of his pawns on the lines and place it on the next line crossing.
2. The pawn can be moved in any direction.
3. Once a player has placed a pawn, it is forbidden to change its place until the other player has played.
4. The players must move their pawn in a short time without delaying their move.
5. Two pawns cannot occupy the same place. The player who comes first to place all his three pawns on one line wins the game (Daoumani, 2019).

44. GRECO-ROMAN ANTIQUITY

Reports of **acrobatic feats** that were very popular from the end of the classical period until the Roman period in the ancient Mediterranean (Attia, 2019, p. 70) seem to speak only of adult acrobats. However, it can be assumed that the children of those times also played acrobatic tricks just as do the North African and Saharan children of today.

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

Trying to perform **acrobatic tricks** and sometimes succeeding in doing them is a popular entertainment, especially among rural Moroccan boys. Examples from North Africa and the Sahara show how boys walk on their hands, tumble and slide down a sand dune or down a high pile of grit used to asphalt roads. Occasionally a big boy will attempt a somersault. A small girl and an older girl swing at an iron bar while others jump rope or an elastic cord.

45. GRECO-ROMAN ANTIQUITY

Amulets. “These small personal objects, of various shapes and materials, which should protect from harm ... can be divided into two groups: on one side the mineral, vegetable or animal amulets with medico-magical properties (horse tooth, ash fly, goat droppings ...); on the other side charms or jewelry capable of neutralizing the evil eye thanks to the combined virtues of their shape (crescent,

bell ...) and their material (gold, amber, deer antler ...). The border between the two categories is however often blurred ... The Roman copy of a statue of a boy from the Hellenistic period (shows) on the child's chest ... a cord on which are strung objects in the shape of a half moon, of clover, leaf, double-ax, hand and dolphin... Other sets relate to *numphê* and marriage.” (Dasen, 2017a).

NORTH AFRICAN RURAL WORLD

The use of **protective amulets** is common in the Moroccan Anti-Atlas. In the 1980s, girls made a necklace with several shells to which they attached a red sachet containing herbs to protect against the evil eye.

An example from 2006 shows a miniature cloth cradle with a baby doll, all hanging from a tripod. A small red bag attached to the baby contains magic protection. This set is completed by a necklace hanging near the baby so that he can have fun by hitting it. A second example of a baby doll cradle was made by a ten-year-old girl. This toy cradle is a copy of the traditional hanging cradle called *azgougel*. The baby is formed with a plank on which the facial features are drawn with natural tar. The black scarf surrounding the top of the head indicates that it is a girl. On the baby's chest a copy of the protective device called *takoummiz* is attached. In the same region and in the same period, two ten and eleven year old girls play at the wedding ceremonies of a couple whose bridegroom wears the same protective amulet on his shoulders. In a similar game, the young bridegroom, represented by a teddy bear, wears a protection against the evil eye, a glass ball hanging from his neck.

CONCLUSION

This text and the PowerPoint on the same theme show the many similarities between games and toys of Greco-Roman Antiquity and those of the rural North African and Saharan world.

A remarkable similarity concerns in particular the dolls linked to rites and feasts (5, 20), the clay animals (26), the musical instruments (28-31), the hoop (32), the cart (35), the ball game with curved sticks (38), the swing (41), the pebbles thrown on water (42), the board game (43) and the acrobatics (44). A similar use of protective amulets is also noted (45).

The reed flute of ancient Greece and that of the young Ghrib adolescents (30) present an exceptional similarity in the level of the construction of this flute as well as in the way of playing it. However, even in this case, it is impossible to choose between two hypotheses: is it a type of flute transmitted over the centuries or a separate invention? An influence cannot be excluded because of the relations which existed in Antiquity between the Greco-Roman world and the Amazigh (Berber) world of North Africa. A similar transmission being possible is signaled by the three-legged terracotta toy animals and the ball game with curved sticks (38) which spanned more than two millennia.

Several games and toys from the two socio-cultural areas represent behaviors and activities of adult women and men and are linked to domestic, professional, ritual or festive life and the life of animals. A few of the toys and games, such as the rattle and skill games, are based on small children's behavior.

However, the comparison between games and toys of Antiquity and games and toys of the rural North African and Saharan world is limited by contextual differences.

- Information from Antiquity most often speaks of the world of adults, while that of North Africa and the Sahara refers to the world of children.
- Information on play in Antiquity concerns mainly the elite, unlike that of North Africa and the Sahara which come from popular milieus.
- The 'toys' of Greco-Roman Antiquity found in tombs are almost always made of durable materials and not of perishable materials as is very often the case for North African and Saharan toys.

Nevertheless, I believe I can emphasize that the analysis of the similarities and differences between the games and toys of these two socio-cultural areas offers new and useful information and perspectives for the study of childhoods, play cultures and the societies in question.

The diversity in games and toys between these two play worlds seems to me at first sight to be based on three important factors.

- The ecological specificities of each natural and human environment: the influence of the seasons and meteorology, a desert, forest, rural or urban environment, a nomadic, semi-nomadic or sedentary lifestyle.

- The socio-cultural context: customs related to gender, child-child and child-adult relationships, social organization, religious beliefs and practices.
- The personality and creativity of players and toy makers, a factor too often overlooked.

This new interdisciplinary approach between ethnographic research and archaeological research was proposed on October 25, 2019 for the first time at the University of Fribourg as part of the Locus Ludi project and received a favorable opinion from the archaeologists present. Some archaeologists of classical antiquity have already expressed the opinion that this comparison offers new and stimulating ways of analyzing and interpreting certain archaeological objects and images. This gives me hope that this comparative essay between games and toys of Greco-Roman antiquity and traditional games and toys of the North African and Saharan rural world will develop in collaboration.

NOTES

1. The books of the collection *Saharan and North African Toy and Play Cultures* (2005-) and related articles are freely available on <https://ucp.academia.edu/JeanPierreRossie>

2. The emphasis placed on the intangible aspect of children's play activities in Antiquity is probably linked to the lack of finds of toys made of perishable materials and to the limited descriptions of these objects in the texts.

3. In Greek Antiquity 'real dolls' undoubtedly existed, but in perishable materials (rags, wax, wood) very rarely preserved. (Dasen, 2005, p. 71). On the other hand, all the dolls created in perishable materials in North Africa and the Sahara could be photographed and collected during the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. Therefore, it is difficult to compare the Greco-Roman 'dolls' with the dolls of North African children. The tombs of small children (1 to 6 years) or those of older children (7 to 14 years) of the protohistoric indigenous world of the South of France do not contain toys (Dedet, 2012, p. 155, 158, 161).

4. According to Michel Manson (2019, p. 114), “historians have difficulty finding traces of ecological toys, made by children and their milieu, and which often, in rural societies, are almost the only toys which provide [these children] with play items.”

5. I think it would be better to make a clear distinction between the use of ‘knucklebones’ or ‘astragals’ and the ‘five stones’ because sometimes “game of knucklebones” is used as a synonym for “game of the five stones” (Ventrelli, 2019, p. 95; Vespa, 2019, p. 126). In rural North Africa, knucklebones from the hind legs of animals are not, to my knowledge, used by children for divination.

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