

ERC *Locus Ludi* International conference

TOYS AS CULTURAL ARTEFACTS
IN ANCIENT GREECE, ETRURIA AND ROME

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Abstracts

HOW TO MAKE TOYS WITH WORDS: TEXTUAL AND LITERARY CONTEXTS

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Les désignations du « jouet » en grec ancien et en latin

Cette communication s'interroge sur la terminologie servant à désigner d'une manière générale le « jouet » dans l'Antiquité grecque et romaine. Si le vocabulaire du jeu est abondant en grec ancien comme en latin, avec des familles de mots riches en faits de dérivation comme de composition (comme celles, en latin, de *lūdus* et de *iocus*, qui s'appliquent respectivement au jeu en actes et au jeu en paroles), les termes susceptibles de désigner le « jouet » sont, en revanche, particulièrement peu nombreux, et leur polysémie peut parfois donner l'impression que les traductions modernes par « jouet » ne font guère qu'essayer maladroitement d'adapter au monde moderne des réalités qui n'existaient pas de la même manière dans ces deux sociétés anciennes : ainsi, par exemple, *lūdīcrum* en latin et *παίγνιον* en grec sont surtout des noms de l'« amusement », ou, le cas échéant, du « jeu », qui, employés à propos de réalités concrètes (constructions de sable, cailloux, colliers, poupées, etc.), peuvent alors se laisser traduire par « jouet » (« amusement » ou « jeu » concrétisé, matérialisé en un objet, etc.).

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Ludicrum, a Word for 'Toy': Origin, Meaning, Use

The paper focuses on the neutral noun *ludicrum* as meaning “toy”, i.e., an object for children to play with. Firstly, a few remarks are presented on the relationship between *ludicrum* and the adjective *ludicer/-crus*. Secondly, a short survey is illustrated of its increasing use over time. *Ludicrum* possibly pertains to the *Umgangssprache*, and, as the semantic area covered by the noun remains wide, whenever *ludicrum* refers to a “toy”, there is always some co-textual element pointing to this (such as the presence of words related to children).

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Toying with Philosophy: The Wondrous Puppet in Plato's Laws

A puppet (θαῦμα, i.e. marionette, jouet) is defined, in the Oxford Dictionary, as “a movable model of a person or animal that is typically moved either by strings controlled from above or by a hand inside it”. While such a definition fits well with the puppet-show in the allegory of the Cave (Pl. Resp. 514a 1-515a 3),

it seems to be at odds with the puppet metaphor in the *Laws*, where the strings (νεῦρα/*neûra*) running inside the puppet (Pl. *Leg.* 644d 7-e 4) appear to be responsible for its movement, which suggests some sort of human agency. However, the human being is later defined as a ‘plaything of the god’ (θεοῦ τι παίγνιον εἶναι μεμηχανημένον, 803c), which brings us back to an external puppeteer. This paper sets out to examine Plato’s use of the puppet metaphor to illustrate the clash between human and divine agency in the *Laws*, in particular the active role of the lead of “calculation” (λογισμός) within the human soul. It also explores the possibility that the quintessentially rationalistic term “calculation” (λογισμός) toys, with what might be referred to as a meta-ludic pun, to the image of the bending puppet as expressed through a quasi-homophone (λυγισμός).

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Persephones’ καλὸν ἄθρομα. Toys, Ornaments, and the Marvel of Music

This communication aims at investigating the evolution of the terms *athyrma/athyrō* in archaic epic and lyric poetry, where the original meanings of toy/playing gradually evolves into their musical counterparts. The semantic shift is implied and possibly encouraged by the connection with the realm of marvel and fascination that the terms assume since their earliest occurrences.

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ἐράσμιον αἰὲν ἄθρομα. Toys, Slaves, and Erotic Objects

This communication aims at investigating the use of the term *athyrma* in erotic contexts, with a particular focus on Hellenistic and Imperial Greek Literature. Particular attention will be paid to its application to human beings, and especially to young slaves, in order to better understand the relationship between the meaning of “toy” and that of “erotic object”.

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Paignia, jeux et jouets

Le terme *paignion* signifie proprement jouet. Il s’agit souvent de l’objet préféré d’un enfant ou d’une divinité, comme dans le sens métaphorique de l’être humain en tant que jouet des dieux ou du destin. Nous examinerons ici les nombreuses occurrences du terme ainsi que celles de ses dérivés, qui montrent des utilisations plus variées. Il peut en effet, de façon attendue, désigner un jeu, quelque chose de peu sérieux, qui amuse, et s’applique notamment aux représentations comiques et aux poèmes légers. D’autres contextes dans lesquels *paignion* apparaît montrent cependant des sens plus surprenants, comme sa signification de « fête religieuse ». L’examen du lien sémantique entre ses différentes acceptions dans les sources grecques peut nous donner une idée plus claire de ce que constituent le jouet et le jeu proprement dits.

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Les jouets dans les épigrammes et les inscriptions votives

Cette enquête, menée à partir de données épigraphiques, portera sur les consécrationes de jouets dans les sanctuaires du monde grec. Les inscriptions votives constituent en effet un témoignage direct des pratiques rituelles antiques. Les offrandes de jouets sont bien attestées dans plusieurs épigrammes votives de l’*Anthologie Palatine*. Pourtant, elles semblent absentes du corpus des inscriptions mises au jour dans les différents sanctuaires du monde grec, de l’époque archaïque à l’époque hellénistique. Si l’on peine à distinguer parmi les épigrammes compilées dans l’*Anthologie Palatine* celles qui étaient réellement destinées à être gravées sur la pierre de celles qui étaient purement fictives, les consécrationes de jouets sont bien attestées par les trouvailles archéologiques. Dans une première partie, nous proposerons une analyse du vocabulaire employé pour désigner les jouets dans les épigrammes votives littéraires, et nous examinerons également les choix de traductions. Nous tenterons ensuite d’établir une typologie des jouets consacrés en fonction de la datation du texte, du genre de l’enfant, de son âge, et de la divinité à laquelle l’offrande était faite. Dans une seconde partie, nous poursuivrons l’enquête dans le corpus épigraphique afin d’examiner la réalité rituelle de ces épigrammes littéraires abondamment commentées. Nous nous efforcerons de confronter ces données à celles des inscriptions sur pierre et des sources matérielles mises au jour dans les sanctuaires du monde grec, en nous intéressant aux jouets – ou du moins aux modèles de jouets – en terre cuite dont certains sont en effet inscrits.

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Airing the Ludic

Extant pneumatic texts from Graeco-Roman antiquity embed demonstrations of manipulations of the properties of air into objects. A minority of these objects, like the syringe or cupping glasses, for example, have obvious medical applications. Of the rest, two categories can be broadly delineated – the sympotic and the zoomorphic – and both revel in their ludic qualities. The former consists of sophisticated vessels which pour wine and water in surprising ways presumably to the delight of gathered guests. In the case of the latter, pneumatic tricks are encased into scenes or figurines, largely of animals, which playfully bring the small objects to life: birds sing, animals drink, pan shoots an apple, a snake hisses.

Pneumatic texts, and the objects they describe, have either been overlooked or overinterpreted on various grounds by modern scholars. The objects have gone from being considered thought experiments that never came to fruition, to frivolous gadgets, to hyper-serious demonstrations of Greek scientific principles. But what if these previously antagonistic approaches were brought together? What if we considered that from their armchairs (as it were), ancient pneumatic engineers invested genuine scientific energy into creating objects of ludic value? The approach I propose has the potential to unearth novel ways of thinking not just about categories of objects (scientific instruments and/as toys), but also categories of epistemology (the scientific informing the make-believe).

Building on the conclusions of Reviel Netz' *Ludic Proof* (2009) and leaning strongly on New Materialist approaches to object agency, this communication seeks to explore the dynamic interactions between the culture of the playful and the culture of the scientific in Graeco-Roman antiquity. The communication will consider the ludic qualities of ancient pneumatic objects both as described within ancient texts, as well as *beyond* the texts, as autonomous performers airing their own ludic capacities.

FUNERARY APPROACHES

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Stone Pebbles as Game Pieces?

Sally Crawford (2009) argued that any object may become a toy in the hands of a child, and it is thus absolutely challenging to identify it without an archaeological context. This is particularly true for stone pebbles and plaques, both found as single object or in multiple series in tombs and sacred sanctuary deposits in the Greek world. The frequent association with subadult burials, for example, makes it possible that at least some of these multiple pebbles and globules were game tools (marbles perhaps?), but it may not be excluded that they were deemed particularly valuable also due to the intrinsic properties and the powerful colours of the stones, being shiny and translucent. The communication aims to bring up an issue which has been suffering from lack of attention for a long time, presenting some intriguing archaeological contexts with pebbles and proposing a meaning for them.

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***Jeux et jouets en contexte : problèmes et méthodes d'interprétation en Grande Grèce et en Sicile* (*Games and Toys in context: Problems and Methods of Interpretation in Magna Graecia and Sicily*)**

Quelle est la portée symbolique des objets et des images ludiques par rapport au contexte de découverte et au milieu culturel dont ils appartiennent ? Y-a-ils des typologies propres à certains groupes d'âge ou de statut qu'on peut relever à partir des associations en contexte ? Quelle est la méthode la plus fiable pour une interprétation correcte de ces données archéologiques ? À partir d'une série de cas d'étude issues du dossier archéologique des colonies de Grande Grèce (Locres, Croton, Herakleia, Poseidonia, Tarente) et Sicile (Syracuse, Lipari), cette intervention propose l'analyse de jeux et jouets anciens, en essayant une lecture contextuelle du matériel et une discussion critique des théories et des méthodes mises en place pour interpréter ces objets.

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The Archaeology of Play in Boeotian Sanctuaries and Graves: a Contribution to the Ludic Culture of a Greek Polis

This communication will present toys from Boeotia by examining finds from the region's sanctuaries and graves. An important corpus of material associated with play was unearthed in the Theban Kabirion sanctuary, namely spinning tops, a yoyo, knucklebones, bells and possibly also gaming pieces which date from the late 5th c. BC to Roman times. These playthings present notable variety of medium and form as they were manufactured in stone, metal and clay, which suggests votive function. The presence of several spinning tops, in particular, is infrequent in Greek cult places. The toy's links with adolescence and its appearance with a specific coroplastic repertoire in the Kabirion points to links with male maturation. The rare appearance of a particular derisive imagery which prioritizes deformed bodies, comic versions of heroic myths and figures of fear on the Kabiric pottery provides a context for associating these toys or effigies with coming of age. The funerary record, on the other hand, provides a slightly different repertoire of playthings, for example rare metal rattles, which are unknown in the Kabirion. Further, the spinning tops which show a concentration in the Theban sanctuary are very rare in the necropoleis. Terracotta objects, such as bells occur in both places, while knucklebones are found in very specific graves and only in very few sanctuaries. Of interest are also an uncanonical die as well as mini terracotta objects associated with childhood such as doll sets, shields and baskets, whose meaning in Boeotia is in need of further study.

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Functional and Fun? Reassessing the Value of Worked Astragali in Ancient Game Practices

A play-centred perspective largely entrenched in archaeological literature has so far guided the interpretation of astragali/knucklebones. This approach which has been originated by a simplistic reading of the ancient sources and a low critical interest towards the archaeological evidence has affected the interpretation of both unworked and worked specimens from different kind of archaeological contexts. The various types of modified bones recorded from Greek sites (polished, trimmed, holed, marked and inscribed astragali) have been read as gaming pieces devoted to different purposes within the game performance (counters, markers, tokens, etc.). The contribution aims at analysing the features of the different artefacts and manufacturing techniques which fall within a range of modifications very well known around the Mediterranean, their distribution and find-contexts in the Greek world. A special focus will be given on their effectiveness in the different game procedures attested by ancient sources, other interpretative keys which can be considered, and new strands of investigations which may help in decoding these problematic kind of archaeological evidence.

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Quelques réflexions sur les objets miniatures en contexte funéraire en Étrurie méridionale.

Dès la fin du VII^e s. av. J.-C., les sanctuaires et les dépôts votifs étrusques ont livré de nombreux exemples d'objets miniatures. Si leurs dimensions réduites sont interprétées comme des substituts symboliques offerts comme dons aux divinités, comment expliquer la présence de miniatures dans les tombes ?

Cette communication cherchera avant tout d'éclaircir quels sont les objets que l'on peut effectivement définir comme « miniatures ». L'étude détaillée des contextes funéraires d'époque hellénistique, en portant une attention particulière aux tombes d'enfants, permettra d'identifier les formes les plus récurrentes, de déterminer si leur présence est caractéristique d'une classe d'âge spécifique et d'analyser s'il existe une codification dans la composition des mobiliers funéraires.

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Encore une enfant, déjà une jeune fille: Naintré (Fr)

En 1997, à Naintré (Vienne), furent découvertes fortuitement deux tombes, l'une contenait un enfant d'une douzaine d'années, très probablement une jeune fille, l'autre une femme adulte, inhumés l'un après l'autre entre la seconde moitié du III^e s. et la première moitié du IV^e s. ap. J.-C. Chacune des deux défuntés reposait dans un cercueil de plomb et un sarcophage de pierre, protégés par un caveau maçonné et voûté, profondément enfoui. Parmi les riches offrandes, des objets en matériaux périssables et des textiles précieux dont une extraordinaire tapisserie d'or, de soie et de pourpre. Autour du cercueil de l'enfant, dans le caveau, se trouvait un mobilier mêlant des objets faisant référence à la toilette, à l'écriture, ainsi qu'une exceptionnelle collection de coquillages marins.

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Chevaux à roulettes grecs et romains en contexte

Les animaux à roulettes, et plus particulièrement des chevaux, sont archéologiquement bien attestés dans le monde grec et romain. Souvent découverts en contextes funéraires associés à des enfants, ils sont conventionnellement identifiés à des objets ludiques. En Grèce proto-géométrique et géométrique (X^e s.-fin du VIII^e s. av. J.-C.), des animaux à roulettes tournés au tour de potier, chargés ou non de récipients, proviennent de sépultures de Grèce continentale et de Crète. La production de chevaux à roulettes ne reprend par la suite qu'à l'époque romaine (I^{er} s.-IV^e s. apr. J.-C.), avec une plus grande variété formelle et des techniques différentes. Des pièces fabriquées à l'aide de moules, avec ou sans cavalier, sont ainsi retrouvés en contexte funéraire en Macédoine et Thessalie, à Corinthe et Athènes. Ce matériel se retrouve aussi plus au nord en Moesie et en Dacie. Cette production est aussi bien attestée en Italie, dans les Gaules et les Germanies romanisées, sans oublier les exemplaires en bois peints d'Égypte romaine. Comment expliquer cette absence de production de près de sept siècles entre l'époque géométrique et le début de l'époque romaine impériale ? Ces objets dont la forme et l'ergonomie semblent être partiellement similaire, ont-ils été fabriqués pour le même usage ? L'étude détaillée des contextes de découverte et de production permet de proposer de nouvelles interprétations.

TOYS IN IMAGES: ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES

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Children's Ball Games on Attic Vases from the 5th and 4th Centuries BCE

From the end of the 5th century BCE, Attic painters depicted many scenes in which children play with small spherical objects. Scholars have interpreted these toys as balls, since children appear to use them in throwing games. This idea suggests the existence of workshops in Athens which produced objects specifically designed for play activities, perhaps even specifically intended for children's games. Such toys, probably made of perishable materials, are not found in the archaeological realia, and no text from the classical period mentions the existence of ball games for children. The particular connections between these images and the so-called "daily life" of the Ancients leads us to a new interpretation of these scenes: can the spherical shape of these objects represent something other than a ball? If so, what conclusions can we draw about what really defines a toy within the visual and metaphorical language of the Attic painters?

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The Representation of Toys in Funerary Contexts

This communication will present methodological issues addressed by the representation of playthings in funerary contexts in Greek and Roman iconography: do they simply characterise the deceased as attributes of a specific age and gender? and if so, do they correspond with archaeological finds and literary references? Or do they operate at other levels too? We will discuss how far these images allow an investigation into the biography of ludic artefacts, their possible ritual function, and their symbolical agency.

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Le cheval bâton de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance : mutations du regard sur l'enfance et ses jouets

Certains jouets existent depuis l'Antiquité : les poupées, les osselets, les balles, et le cheval bâton. Est-ce que cela veut dire que les jouets sont éternels et n'ont pas d'histoire comme le pensait Becq de Fouquières, à part les transformations matérielles et techniques des objets ? Nous voudrions, en suivant l'exemple du cheval bâton de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance, montrer que derrière l'apparence d'un jouet pérenne se cachent des mutations du regard sur l'enfant et ses jouets. Une première partie explore le jouet antique, et comment les discours où il apparaît en font l'objet d'une folie ou d'une sagesse lorsque ce sont des adultes qui le chevauchent. Au Moyen Âge, il se transforme en symbole de la petite enfance et permet de mettre en scène des jeux de tournois. Mais le rapport à la folie revient aussi. À la Renaissance, le cheval bâton s'offre à une pluralité de regards, celui de Rabelais comme celui des artistes dont les représentations le montrent présent

dans les rues, sur les places et dans les boutiques. La mode des séries iconographiques de jeux d'enfants permet de le mettre en scène dans une reconnaissance et une exploration du ludique enfantin par les artistes. Les rapports de l'enfant au cheval, la place changeante du cheval dans la société, l'attention nouvelle portée à l'enfance, tout cela modifie les significations que ce jouet représente au fil de l'Histoire.

TOYS IN SACRED CONTEXTS

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Ritual Offerings or Divination Tools? Objects of Play from the Roman Republic Sanctuary of Diana in Nemi

Recent research conducted in the sanctuary of Diana at Nemi entailed both fieldwork and a study of the materials scattered in several collections because of the old excavations in the area, to re-examine and attempt to re-contextualize them. Diana is a goddess of the limit, she lives in a wild and extra-urban dimension, she protects women and slaves, children and young people in their transitions of status, women in childbirth and in the care of small children, when they do not yet fully belong to the human dimension. Relative to the ritual formalization of such status transitions should be the offer of objects of play or human representations bearing toys in the sanctuary space, as usual in ancient Lazio in other sanctuaries, such as that of Minerva in Lavinium or Bona Dea in Fregellae.

Among the thousands of objects found in Nemi, statistically the pieces of this type are few, while real toys for small children, which Diana protects, are absent. Almost absent are also the figurines of dedicants carrying games and children with animals: it is also not clear whether they are simply replicas of widespread moulds or have a particular meaning. The depictions of children are also rare, while only one is the statuette of a nursing mother. The miniature vases are also in limited quantities and above all they are such a typical feature of the sanctuaries of central Italy in this period that it does not seem correct to interpret them as toys for children.

The ones we have at the sanctuary of Nemi are above all "Grown-Ups games", such as pawns and knucklebones, of which is also known the possible relationship with activities related to forecasting the future (activity that we know took place in the sanctuary of Nemi). The contribution therefore tries to explore the complexity of the data of a cult that we know at the level of historical sources, trying to carry out the right interpretative analysis of the materials found.

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Toys or Models of Toys: Objects in Terracotta and Bronze from the Demeter and Kore sanctuary at Ancient Corinth

This communication will focus on a class of finds from the Demeter and Kore sanctuary at ancient Corinth that can be defined as toys. These include numerous terracotta spinning tops and rattles of usual and unusual shapes and terracotta and bronze *astragaloi* (knucklebones). After presentation of the finds, their chronological framework and relevant details of their manufacture, the communication will concentrate on discussing several questions that arise: were these real artefacts or replicas; were they produced for the specific purpose of dedication to the Sanctuary's deities; which cultic events or practices might have triggered their dedication; and, by whom were they dedicated in terms of age and gender.

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Des offrandes miniatures pour les dieux des Étrusques : des jouets pour grandir ?

Ma communication porte sur des offrandes miniaturisées retrouvées, par exemple, dans les complexes cultuels de Gravisca et de Pyrgi. Il s'agit notamment de petites armes, telles que des lances et des casques, ainsi que des vases miniatures. Les chercheurs ne s'entendent pas sur leur signification, mais les petits récipients ont également été retrouvés dans un sanctuaire du Latium, Lavinium, dont la plupart des offrandes, ainsi que sa situation extra-urbaine laissent à penser qu'il s'agissait d'un lieu de transition où les jeunes enfants et les jeunes gens de la cité y déposaient les objets représentant l'étape accomplie pour passer à celle suivante et devenir un adulte utile à la communauté. Cette similarité avec les lieux de culte étrusques pourrait-elle mettre en lumière la réalisation d'un rite de passage ? Peut-on voir ces petits objets comme des

jouets ? Qui aurait pu les déposer ? Faut-il les genrer ? Dans ce cas, les petits vases auraient-ils été déposés par des jeunes femmes et les instruments de guerrier par des jeunes hommes ?

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Rite de Passage or Special Ability? The Bronze Statuette of a Boy Holding a Spinning Top in the Munich Collection of Antiquities

An impressive, 36 centimeters high bronze statuette shows a naked young man holding a spinning top in his raised right hand. He presents the top in the form of a blossom or an offering rather than a toy. On the basis of this Etruscan bronze statuette in the Munich Collection of Antiquities, my aim is to present the spinning top as a toy for children, adolescents and adults of both sexes in Classical Antiquity.

The Munich statuette, however, probably served as a dedication. Therefore, this communication also takes a close look at its specific intention. Does it represent an adolescent on the threshold to adulthood, who dedicated his toy in a rite de passage to a god such as Hermes? Or did a young man dedicate this statuette to the god in a more abstract sense, perhaps connected to his special ability of playing with the spinning top, as we know from acrobats or magicians?

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Dancing with a Ball: Written Sources and Material Evidence

Representations of young female dancers are spread across a broad geographical space and a wide chronological spectrum in the ancient world. Yet it is only recently that these groups of dancers have been incorporated into the body of sources and documentation for the study of ancient dance within an archaeological approach to dance performances. This research field adopts not only a historicist approach, through which it aims to investigate dance performances of the past related to cultural and social changes, but also an anthropological-religious approach. The latter allows us to investigate the relationship between dance performances, cults and rituals. Furthermore, the study of archaeological evidence concerning dance and the context of its discovery sheds light on the function of dance performances in ancient societies, allowing us to reconstruct the function of dance and ritualised movements in the ancient world.

Taking into account this approach, this communication aims to investigate representations of young female dancers depicted and/or carved on various media in the world. Indeed, archaeological evidence highlights the importance of dance in the sphere of childhood and of play. Moreover, especially female figurines representing dancing and playing young girls in circle or in chain illuminate the function of dance not only as a form of social interaction with the surrounding world, but also on its role both in the ritual processes of the life cycle of girls and in the cultural process of education for their integration into the female world.

TOYS IN DIACHRONY

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From άθυρμα and παίγιον to παιχνίδι. Defining Toys in Modern Greece

In 1900 Stefanos Koymanoudis reported in his *Dictionary* of new terms created by Greek scholars from 1453 to the dawn of the 20th century 4 new composite words whose first part was linked to the word άθυρμα: αθυρματοποιία, αθυρματοποιοί, αθυρματοπώλαι, αθυρματοπωλεία (Gougoulis and Karakatsani 2008: 11). As National Statistics reporting toys imports and toy production further illustrate, άθυρμα was the term adopted by the Greek Nation State to denote the emergent commercial toy sector in Greece during the first half of the 20th century reflecting the classicist spirit of the official Greek language the καθαρεύουσα. What other terms were used by Greek scholars and how did they relate to colloquial uses of other terms to denote commercial or hand-made playthings? The communication discusses the trajectory of modern Greek terms depicting the notion “toy” in the history of the Greek toy market and Greek Play Studies from the 19th century to the present.

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Vegetal Material in Moroccan Children's Toy and Play Culture

The communication discusses information about girls, possibly boys, between two and twelve years of age. I have not always gathered this information through personal observation but also thanks to Khalija Jariaa and Boubaker Daoumani, my two Anti-Atlas collaborators, since 2003. A preliminary remark seems necessary because I do not use the term small children. The reason is that putting an age on categories like small, older, young, and adolescent girls or boys is questionable. In any case, Moroccan girls and boys going to primary school would not like to be called a small child. Moreover, extending the concept of small girls and small boys to children who continue playing is not feasible as fourteen-year-old ones do this. Different types of vegetable material are often used by girls and sometimes boys when making toys. These children speak Tamazight or Tashelhit and belong to the Amazigh populations of the Moroccan Middle Atlas, High Atlas, Anti-Atlas, and Pre-Sahara.

Vegetal material is used as a central tree in a child village, for making a whistle, for magical protection on dolls, for dolls to implore rain and fertility, or a doll to participate in a traditional dance. This kind of natural material is also used to play farm life, weave a dromedary, make a horse, give a head to a doll, create a tourist train or cars, make colours, and glaze clay toys. A 30-months-old girl made a doll with a piece of cactus.

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Toys, Toying, Toyish: The Semiotics of Toys from Objectual Play to Toyification

This presentation offers a theoretical and methodological approach for the semiotic study of toys and toy-related practices. Eugen Fink describes toys as “magical” objects, whose meaning depends on the context from which we look at them. Toys are indeed better described as a specific type of sign functions than as a class of objects: after all sticks, corks, and many other things can also be used as toys. If it is the action of toying that makes a toy, nonetheless, the objects created to be toys have common aesthetic characteristics (colours, lightness, texture...) structured in an emerging toyishness. Toyification, finally, describes what happens when toys, toying and toyishness exceed their cultural boundaries and invade non-playful contexts.

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