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The children of King Araras. Two are playing "astragalos," two with tops. Ca. 8th century B.C., found in Carchemish.

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Children still play "astragalos" in West Anatolia and elsewhere in Anatolia. Even Herakleitos of Ephesus once played "astragalos" with children.



# Children's Games

Musa Baran

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Child's play—it is not as simple as we think. Men and even animals begin their lives in play. Grandfathers pass their final happy days playing with their grandchildren. Children learn more easily in games and they make their friends most readily while playing. And in play their personality is also formed. Goethe's dictum, "The greatest fortune of Earth's children is only their personality," is still true.

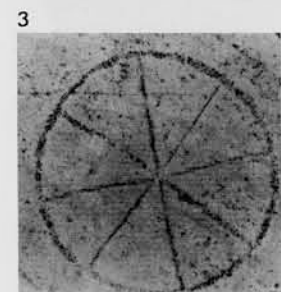
Everywhere there appears to be a similarity among children's games. One discovers no great differences between countries, peoples, and times. We read in the works of Homer about some games; most popular were the following children's games: ball playing, the game of knuckle-bones, playing with wasps, playing in the sand, and playing with tops. These games are still played in his country, in West Anatolia.

We see an especially beautiful depiction on a relief from the 8th century B.C., which was found in Carchemish. The toys are visible in the hands of the children: they are bones and tops. In antiquity these bones were called "astragalos." Tops were called "strombos." Today we hear this latter word from the children in West Anatolia, who say:

"Ena mena donsi, donsi donsi strambonsi, strambos, strambos, dingili badem tos." This is how they count to choose sides at the beginning of a game.

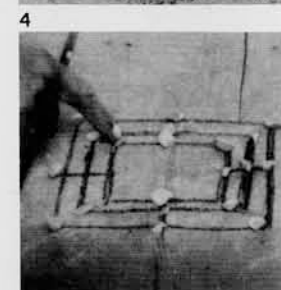


1 So-called "astragalos" player. But she is not a player, but rather a fortune-teller.



2 Achilles and Ajax playing "mill." Detail picture of the Exekias amphora.

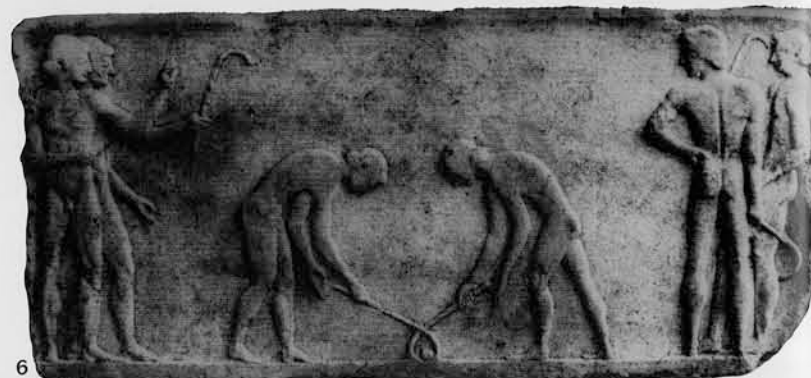
6 Ball game with sticks. From ancient times.



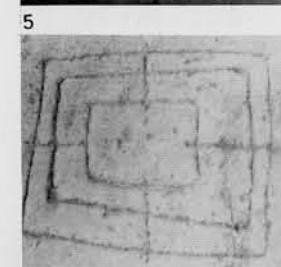
3 "Mill" drawing on the streets of Ephesus from Roman times.

4 Another type of "mill" game, still played today in Anatolia. It is called "nine-stones."

5 One also played with nine stones in ancient times. The picture is from Ephesus, from early Byzantine times.



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7 Ball game with sticks. Our children of today play it in West Anatolia, in the village of Bademler. It is called "mosa mosa."



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8 Present-day hoop game in Smyrna.

9 Painting from early Byzantine times, in Istanbul: children playing with hoops.



Children playing with "astragaloi" were a popular theme for depiction in ancient times. But in the statue here we do not see a girl playing, but rather a fortune-teller. This player is thus not lost in thought. Even present-day children use these bones for fortune-telling.

The amphora in the Vatican, which Exekias painted around 525 B.C., shows us warriors at play. They were probably playing "mill." Not only the warriors did this; sometimes even the philosophers played it with children. The elements of this game are well known. We see "mill" drawings even in later times on the streets, steps and everywhere in ancient cities. Still today our children play this game.

On the statue base which was made in Athens around 500 B.C. we see ball playing, stick ball, and catch. Ball playing and catch are very widespread. But this ball game with sticks is played only in a village which lies between Teos and Klazomenai. In this village—Bademler—we find still other ancient traditions.

We see this similarity also in other games: pickaback, rolling a hoop, playing with nuts, board games, and still others.

Another board game, something like pachisi, was probably played with dice in antiquity. Today our children play it in Bademler with sticks.

Today the children play hop-scotch with a flat stone in squares. They call it "nos." This word also derives from ancient times. There is a similarity between this game and the ancient "nux emara" or "ostrakinda."

Still another example for a common game is known to us today from Turkey, Germany, and Russia:

"Nokta nokta virgül hat, al sana koca bir surat."

"Punkt punkt komma strich, fertig ist das mondgesicht."

"Toçka toçka zapi taya, nosik rotik aborotik."

(Period, period, comma, dash, the moonman's face is finished.)

Now we can conclude from this:

"Our children have only their own world. They create this beauty themselves. Thank God. There are no national or religious influences in this field."

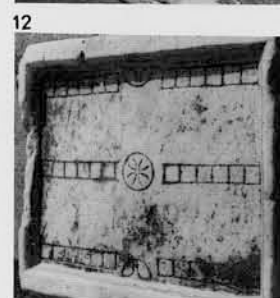
So let the children play. **2**



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10,11 Nutgame players from ancient (Hellenistic) times and from today in Bademler.

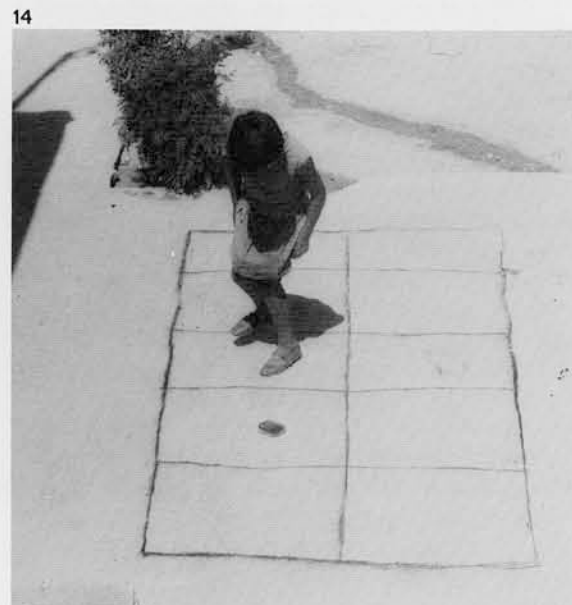


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12 A game board in Ephesus from Roman times.

13 Today our children play roughly similar games with small sticks (in the hand of the child one sees four sticks). It was played with dice in ancient times.

14 A child playing hop-scotch in Smyrna. It is called "nos."



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Musa Baran was born in 1924 in a village near Smyrna. He studied archaeology at Istanbul University, preparing a study on the Anatolian Goddess. Dr. Baran has worked at Ephesus and Pergamum, and for the last seven years has been associated with the Izmir Museum.