The Game of the Owl

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Introduction

The Game of the Owl is a simple gambling game in which the players pay to or take stakes from a pool according to the throw of three normal (six-sided) dice. In Italy, the currently-assumed country of origin, it is known by the name *Pela il Chiu[1]*, meaning 'pluck the owl': the owl being regarded as proverbially stupid in that country, an element of cheating the unwary is perhaps implied. In other countries, the name is neutral: *Le jeu de la chouette* in France, *Das Eulenspiel* in Germany[2], *Het Uilenbord* (or *Uilenspel*) in the Netherlands. The earliest example comes from Italy in the late 16th century; the game is listed in the Vaccari stocklist of 1614 as *'Il giuco del pela Chiù'*, along with a small group of other games, including the Game of the Goose.[3] It also appears in the de Rossi inventory of 1648, documenting the division of the inheritance from Giuseppe de Rossi the elder.[4] Later, the 17th century sees examples outside of Italy. In the Low Countries and France, the game continues into the 19th century.

The game is generally classed as a board game, most examples being printed on a sheet of paper, though examples in inlaid wood are also found. However, in reality the sheet serves only as a set of instructions as to how much is to be paid to or taken from the pool for a given throw of the dice. No stakes or markers are placed on the cells of the board, though its centre is conveniently used to accommodate the pool of stakes to which the players initially contribute in equal amounts and which the eventual winner will collect. In this regard, it is to be contrasted with the Game of the Goose, which it superficially resembles: that of course is a race game where tokens representing the players move around the board on a spiral track.

The Game of the Owl has been comparatively little studied. Thierry Depaulis has noticed it in his survey of gambling games classed as '*loteries du salon'*.[5] However, no systematic analysis of the differences between versions of the game has been made. This paper seeks to perform such an analysis, resulting in a typology based on numerical and iconographic characteristics. The playing characteristics of different versions of the game are discussed, with the aid of newly-developed computer models, and set against the background of the historical development of combinatorial mathematics.

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[1] Thierry Depaulis notes that the word *civetta* is more commonly used in Italy: *chiu* is identified as a Bolognese word in Antoine Oudin's *Dictionnaire italien et françois* – revised by Giovanni Veneroni ,1681.
[2] Sometimes *Käuzchenspiel* – game of the Little Owl.
[3] Francesco Ehrle, *Roma prima di Sisto V.* Rome: Danesi, 1908. The brothers Andrea Vaccari (1573-1627) and Michelangelo Vaccari (1576-after 1630) were printers and publishers in Rome. Their catalogue of 1614, now in the Biblioteca Civica of Mantua, lists about 1500 plates. It was republished by Francesco EHRLE, Roma prima di Sisto V, Rome, Danesi, 1908. The games are listed at p. 62.
[4] Francesca Consagra, *The De Rossi Family Print Publishing Shop*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI, 1993, p. 512.
[5] Thierry Depaulis, *Jeux de Hasard sur Papier*: les 'loteries du salon'. *Le Vieux Papier*, fasc. 303, January 1987. Pp. 183-185 and fasc. 304, April 1987, pp. 225-233. Offprint *Jeux de Hasard sur Papier*, 1987.

The overall analysis points to the hypothesis that Brambilla's was not the original form of the game, which had its roots most probably in Germany, the source of the *Till Eulenspiegel* [owl-glass] tales, after which the game was named.

1. Combinations of dice throws in the Owl game

Fig. 1 – Jeu de la Chouette, Paris: Veuve Petit [Type I]. (BnF)

The nature of the game is well shown in the example of figure 1. It is by la Veuve Petit and is a unique impression from the rue Montorgeuil in Paris. It dates from about 1640 but is from an earlier woodblock and is the earliest non-Italian impression.[6] It represents all the combinations of the three dice in a logical way. The number of combinations ('chances') possible as the outcome of throwing three dice is 216 [i.e. 6x6x6]. These combinations fall into three classes: (a) those where all three dice show the same number; (b) those where two dice show the same number and the third shows a different number; and (c) those where all three show a different number. For convenience, we shall call these classes (a) 'triplets'; (b) 'doublets' [in reality a double and a single]; and (c) 'singlets'. A given triplet (e.g. 555) can be formed in only one way. However, a doublet such as 551 can be formed in three ways: as 551, 515, or 155 if (as in the game) the order of the dice is not significant. A singlet such as 641 can be formed in six ways: 641, 614, 461, 416, 164, 146. Any doublet is therefore three times more probable (three chances) than any triplet (one chance), while any singlet is six times more probable (six chances) than any triplet.

On the game sheet, these classes are represented as follows. The triplets are spaced round the outer circle, where they are each distinguished by the image of an owl. The doublets are ranged round the outer circle, between the owls, in an order that is logical, but not determined uniquely. Finally, the singlets are ranged round the inner circle, also in a logical order. All possible throws are accounted for: there are 6 triplets, 30 doublets, and 20 singlets, so that the 216 chances are made up as: 6x1 plus 3x30 plus 6x20.

The triplet 666 wins the whole pool while any other triplet wins half the stakes in the pool; if their number is odd, the extra one remains in the pool. For other throws, the instruction is to 'pay' [shown here by P for the French 'paye'] or 'take' [shown by T for 'tire'] the stated number of stakes. 'Do nothing' (neither take nor pay) is signified by 'Rien'. Play continues until 666 is thrown. Before that event, the pool may be exhausted as the result of a 'take' instruction: whenever this occurs, the players refresh the pool as at the beginning.

The tabulation of the chances on three dice was first effected by Bishop Wibold in A.D. 965 in his *Ludus Clericalis.*[7] Each of the 56 possible results was associated with a particular virtue, acquired by the player who first threw that combination, gaining points according to a complicated formula.[8] The game continued until all the virtues had been thus acquired. However, the correct enumeration of the chances on three dice, allowing calculation of the probabilities of each throw, was not generally known in Europe until well into the seventeenth century. Although Gerolamo Cardano set out the fundamentals of probability

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[6] Paris: chez La Veufue [veuve] de Charles Petit, Rue Montorgueil, chez vn E[sp]icier deuant les trois Mores, n.d., printed c. 1640, probably from the woodblock of Charles Petit, active 1607–1636; see Thierry Depaulis. 'Trois jeux imprimés du début du XVIIe siècle par la veuve Petit à Paris', *Arbeitskreis Bild Druck Papier*, Band 16, 2011. Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2012, pp. 35–50.

[7] Published in Baldericus Noviomensis, *Chronicon Cameracense et Atrebatense, siue historia utriusque Ecclesiæ*, III. Libris Duaci: Ex officina I. Bogardi, 1615.

[8] Donald E. Knuth, *The art of computer programming*, vol. 4A : *Combinatorial algorithms*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Addison-Wesley Professional, 2014.

theory in his book, *Liber de ludo aleae* [Book on Games of Chance], written about 1564, it was not published until 1663. The first treatise on the subject to be widely circulated was the *Libellus de Ratiociniis in Ludo Aleae*, [the Value of all Chances in Games of Fortune] by Christiaan Huygens, published in 1657. It was the first published text on probability and remained the standard textbook on the subject for the next half century. As we shall see, the development of the Game of the Owl straddles this date and it is a question for discussion how far the game was influenced by these theoretical considerations, if at all.

2. A suggested typology of Owl games

All known versions of the Owl game have certain features in common:

- The cells containing representations of the dice throws are arranged in two concentric bands, either circular or roughly oval.
- Each cell is associated with a distinctive graphic.
- There are 36 cells in the outer band and 20 in the inner.
- The cells representing the owl throws are spaced round the outside band.
- all other possible throws are represented uniquely in cells somewhere on the game.
- the game ends when a throw of 666 takes the pool of stakes.

However, the versions may differ in:
- the pay/take numbers
- the arrangement of cells
- the iconography of the graphics.

These differences are used in what follows to construct a typology of Owl games. For each type, the features determining the classification are briefly noted, with detailed discussion of the games of each type in later sections. For ease of reference to particular cells, it is convenient to number the cells in the outer band clockwise from 1 to 36, beginning with the owl throw of 666, and to number the inner cells from 37 to 56, beginning at a cell on the same radius as that of 666 (see figure 2).
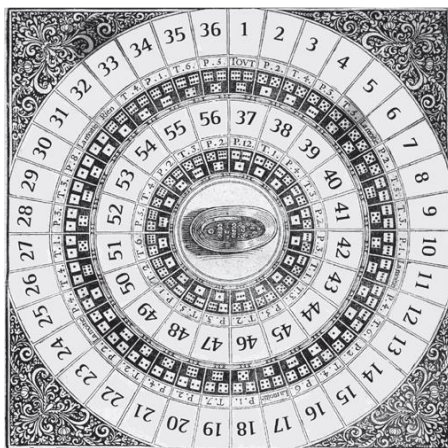
Fig. 2 – Numbering of the cells for reference in this paper

Type I - Veuve Petit

The exemplar of type I (Fig. 1) is the game by the Veuve Petit already mentioned.
The iconography of all games of this type is practically identical, with household objects predominating. There are several animals, including an ass, the only human figure being that of a defecating man, plausibly associated with the stories of Till Eulenspiegel. The arrangement is in two concentric circular bands. All the doublet throws appear between the owl throws in the outer circle while the singlet throws all appear in the inner circle. The pay/take numbers, their ordering, and their association with dice throws are common to all examples of this type. Games of Type I include German as well as early French examples.

Type II – Jegher

Fig. 3 – Uylen Spel, by Jan Christoffel Jegher, Dordrecht: Gerrit van Kamen [Type II]. (Rijksmuseum)

The game shown in Fig. 3 is chosen as the exemplar of Type II.[9] This version is entitled *Het nieuwe tydkortige uylenspel* [The new time-killing game of the owl]; it was designed by Jan Christoffel Jegher of Antwerp (1618-1667) [signing as 'J Jeghers sc.'] and was printed in Dordrecht by Gerrit van Kamen. The Buijnsters date it to about 1640 and say that it is the oldest South-Netherlands Owl game.[10]

The iconography of games of this type is significantly different from that of Type I, though it conforms to the general description given for that type and includes the defecating man. As in Type I, the doublet throws are interspersed between the owl throws in the outer circle while the singlet throws all appear in the inner circle. The pay/take numbers, their ordering, and their association with dice throws are common to the known examples of Type II; the only difference from the numbers of Type I is that cell 26 has 'niet' [= 'not', meaning 'do nothing'] instead of 'take 4'. Known examples of Type II are Dutch and from the mid-17th century.

Type III – Koene

Fig. 4 – [Uilenspel], Amsterdam: Koene [Type III] (author's collection)

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[9] Rijks Museum, http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.129213 there dated 1628 - 1667.
[10] P J Buijnsters and L Buijnsters-Smets. *Papertoys – Speelprenten en papieren speelgoed in Nederland (1640–1920)*. Zwolle: Waanders, 2005, p. 105.

The third type occurs in later French and Dutch games, here represented by the game by Koene (Fig. 4).[11] Games of this type have iconography practically identical to the games of type I, including the image of the defecating man. In the Dutch examples, but not the French, the link with Till Eulenspiegel is emphasised by the central decoration, which depicts an owl and a looking-glass. Doublets and singlets are again allocated to the outer and inner bands respectively. The detailed arrangement of cells is similar to that of Types I and II, but not identical. However, six of the 'pay' numbers are increased to 6 so as to make a more substantial contribution to the pool during play, e.g. Space 10 – jar overturned – pay 6 instead of 1, space 23 – lavatory – pay 6 instead of 2. The consequences of this for play will be explored later.

Type IV – Brepols

Fig. 5 – Uilenbord, Turnhout: Brepols [Type IV] (Rijksmuseum)

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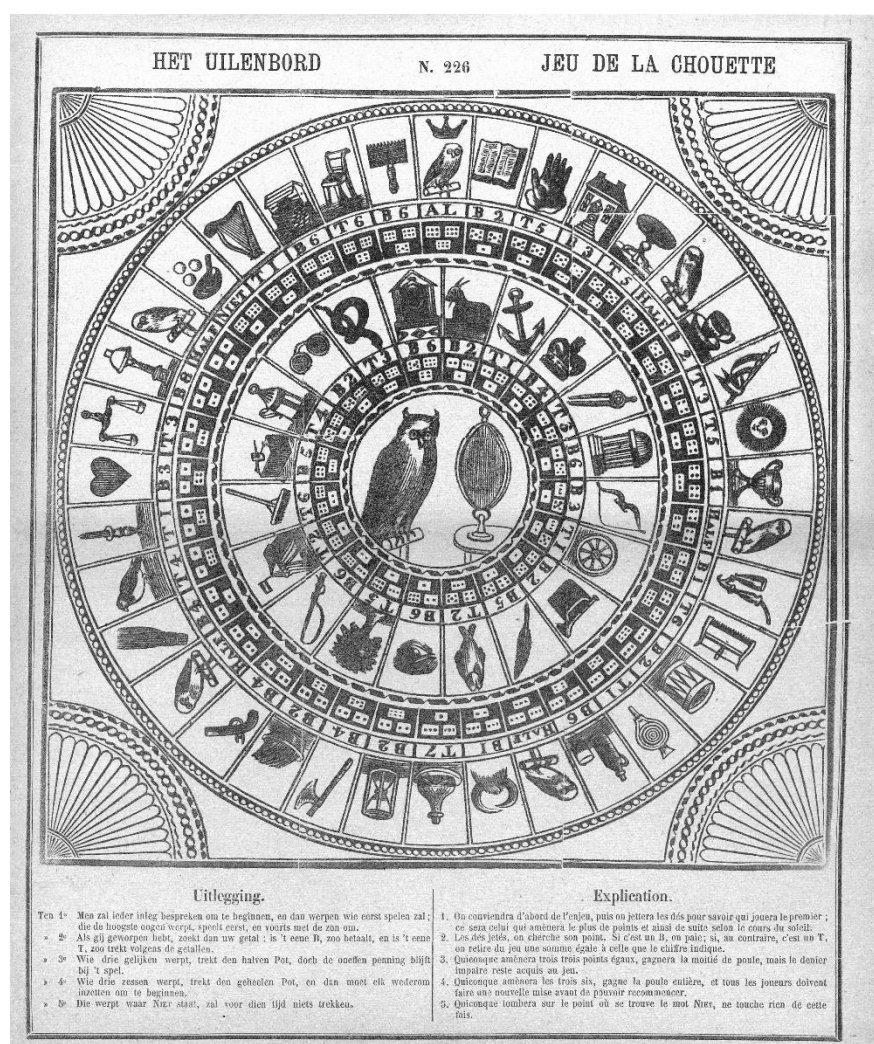
[11] The Atlas van Stolk collection has an example of this game dating from about 1775 - AvS 5764. The figure shows a reprint from the author's collection dating between 1814 and 1830.

The most modern type, occurring in late 18th-century French games and 19th-century Dutch and Belgian games, is represented by the game by Brepols of Turnhout (Fig. 5).[12] This type shares the features of Type III except that, among numerous other changes of image, the iconography has been sanitised by removal of the unwholesome image of the defecating man. However, the link with Till Eulenspiegel is often emphasised by the central decoration of an owl with a looking-glass. The pay/take numbers differ also from the earlier standards but have roughly the same overall effect as those of Type III in regard to the contribution to the pool during play.
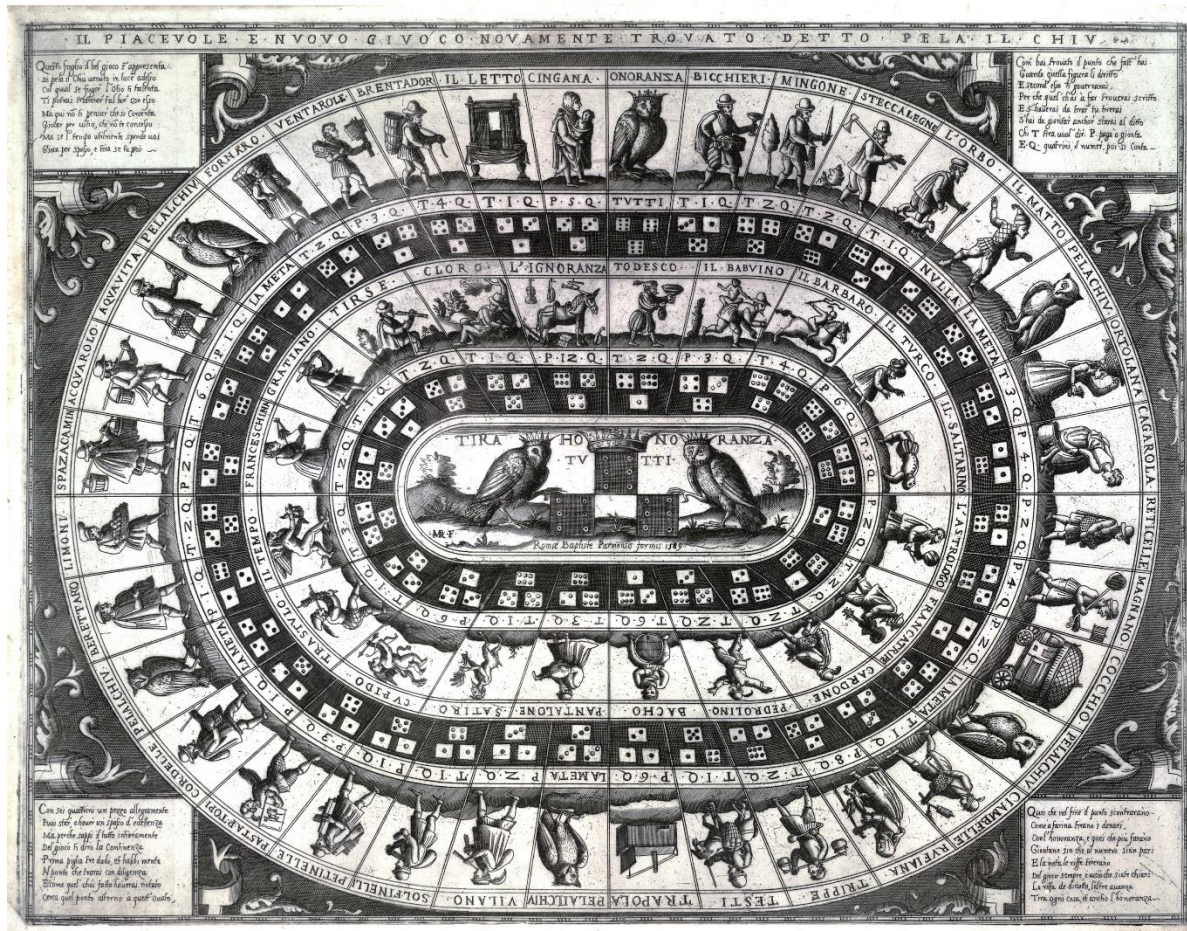
Type V – Brambilla

Fig. 6 – Pela il Chiu by Ambrogio Brambilla. Rome: Panzera [Type V]. (© Trustees of the British Museum)

All the games of this type are Italian and have the *Pela il Chiù* title. The game published in 1589 by Ambrogio Brambilla (Fig. 6) is chosen as the exemplar of the types. The title is: *Il Piacevole e Nuovo Giuoco Novamente Trovato Detto Pela il Chiù* [The new and pleasant game, newly found, called Pluck the Owl]. It is indeed the earliest-dated example of any

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[12] Rijks Museum http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.540242 there dated 1800 - 1833.

form of the game and is therefore usually assumed to be the original form, though this assumption will be challenged below.

The two concentric bands of cells have straight sides joined at the ends by semicircles. This version of the game does not differentiate between doublets and singlets in its arrangement of cells, though the owl cells are always spaced around the outer band. The cells are decorated with images, mostly of human figures, including *commedia dell'arte* characters and street vendors. The iconographic subjects are essentially common to all games of this type but with minor variations of arrangement. Pay/take numbers show rather more variety in detail but are again largely in common.

3. Iconography

Games of Type I

The Veuve Petit game of Type I shown in Fig. 1 presents in its iconography a collection of diverse images that recall the heterogeneity of images in draw-lottery games such as the Spanish *Auca* or the Italian *Giuoco Romano*[13] or *Bribissi.* The subjects are not all easy to identify, as the following list indicates, beginning with the outer ring:[14]

> Owl, hand pays coin, fishing rod and fish, **sow drinking at barrel**, hand rakes in coin
> Owl, **shears**, shovel, spider and web, **jar overturned**
> Owl, **candles (?) on a table**[15], purse open with hand, gridiron, wheat stalk with insect, headless chicken
> Owl, Jew's harp, dog feeding, brush, cradle, **chicken on spit**, **lavatory**
> Owl, wall box, cock, turd and stick, fetters, **fire tongs**, lantern
> Owl, **soap bubbles**, **wire basket for cooking**, hen on nest, **pot and ladle**, **curry comb**

And on the inner ring:

> **Ass**, distaff and spindle, broom with coins, **pincers with coins**, **broken egg in eggcup** money bag on chair, **perforated spoon**, **grapnel**, **man defecating**, dice box
> **snuffer** [but here cutting off a person's nose], **cat**, **jug**, **secateurs**, **rake with coins** cutpurse, hand with coins, **spectacles**, **tine hoe with coins**, wineskin.

Any attempt to find a complete and consistent inner logic in these images is doomed. However, examination of the pay/take numbers associated with particular images shows some level of ingenuity. Most obviously, the soap bubbles at space 32 have the instruction 'nothing'. Other images are loosely associated with ideas of paying or taking, but even here the correspondence is incomplete. The largest payments to the pool are:

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[13] See Thierry Depaulis, 'L'illusion d'un passé : fable Express', *Le Vieux Papier*, fasc. 347, January 1998, p. 40-43.
[14] Bold type indicates subjects corresponding to those found in Type II.
[15] The 'candles' are seen more clearly in the game of figure 7 by Paulus Fürst.

space	title	throw	pay
37	ass	321	12
30	lantern	211	8
16	headless chicken	443	6
36	curry comb	665	5
45	man defecating	542	5
52	cut purse	643	5

while the largest drawings from the pool, apart from the Owl throws, are:

19	dog feeding	644	-7
13	purse open with hand	331	-6
35	cooking pot and ladle	664	-6
51	rake with coins	642	-6

No regular scheme is evident. However, the presence of the ass at the top of the list of payments is significant.

A print produced around 1700 by Jean Musier, Parisian bookseller and binder, exactly reproduces the Veuve Petit game board, reprinting the same woodblock but re-setting the rules.[16]

Fig. 7 detail - In the game of Paulus Fürst, the owl has caught a bat. The 'candles' in the B4 space are well shown

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[16] *Le plaiasant et nouveau jeu de la Chouette*. Paris: chez Jean Musier, rue de Petit-Pont à l'Image S. Antoine, N.D. Coll. James Dalgety, Puzzle Museum, Devon (UK).

Fig. 7 – Eullen Spiegel. Nuremberg: Paulus Fürst [Type I] (Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, photo Georg Janssen)

Two important examples from Germany closely reproduce the iconography in its subjects and their arrangement around the board. Figure 7 shows an example from the middle of the

17th century by Paulus Fürst[17] of Nuremberg. It is entitled *Das new vnd kurtz-weillige Eullen Spiegel Spiel* [The new and entertaining Eulenspiegel game] and so provides a clear and definite link with Till Eulenspiegel.[18] A second example with a corresponding title, *Bericht und Reguls dieses Eulnspiegels Spiel* [Report and rules of this Eulenspiegel game],[19] has similar iconography, including a decoration in the centre circle which is practically identical. However, the owls in the outer ring have been replaced with images of fools [*Narren*].

In the Veuve Petit game, the ass has at its feet an open book; in the German versions, the ass has one of its feet resting on the book. As explained below, this is a clear reference to a tale of Till Eulenspiegel.

Games of Type II

Turning now to the Jegher game of Type II shown in figure 3, we find, in corresponding cells, numerous equivalences in the iconographic subjects as compared with the games of Type I. These are indicated here in bold:

> Owl, coins from can, landing net, **sow drinking at barrel**, coins in wall basket
> Owl, **shears**, long-handled pot, shovel, **jar overturned**
> Owl, **candles (?) on a table**, fishing rod and fish, gridiron, garden, crab
> Owl, grater, biscuits from tin, straw bunch, rat trap, **drill**[20], **lavatory**
> Owl, sack full, woman's headdress, lute, clacker, **fire tongs**, purse emptying
> Owl, **soap bubbles**, **wire basket for cooking**, egg, **pot and ladle**, **curry comb**

and on the inner ring:

> **Ass**, nosebag, smoking pipe, **pincers with coins**, **broken egg in eggcup**
> sieve with coins, **perforated spoon**, **grapnel**, **man defecating**, egg cup
> **snuffer** [but not cutting off nose], **cat**, **jug**, **secateurs**, **rake with coins**
> sickle, scoop with coins, **spectacles**, **tine hoe with coins**, table lamp.

These correspondences are clearly beyond co-incidence. One of the differences is that the empty female headdress at space 26 (nothing) replaces the cock (take 4), perhaps symbolising a similar emptiness to that of the soap bubbles.

The other important example of a Type II game is that by Claes Jansz. Visscher of Amsterdam (1587-1652), the largest dealer of his day, specialising in buying and reprinting older plates. In his engraving, dating from about 1640, the iconographic subjects and their arrangement are identical with those of the Jegher game, except that the lute at space 27 is

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[17] Print publisher born in 1608; his widow and heirs continued the firm after his death in 1666 until 1704.

[18] Leonie von Wilckens ed., *Spiel, Spiele, Kinderspiel*, exhibition catalogue. Nuremberg: 1986, cat. number 65.

[19] In the collection of the Institut für Spielforschung und Playing Arts, Universität Mozarteum, Salzburg.

[20] Thierry Depaulis, who has kindly assisted in the identification of these images, notes the visual similarity of this image to that of the chicken on the spit seen in Type I games.

replaced by a different musical instrument: a recorder. The corner and central decorations are also the same.[21] In these examples, the ass is not provided with a book.

Games of Type III

Games of Type III with their increased payments to the pool begin to appear in the 18th century. An engraving by Crépy of about 1720-30 exactly reproduces the Veuve Petit game as to iconographic subjects and their placing on the game.[22] The same is true of the edition by Letourmy of about 1780,[23] itself probably copied from the engraving by Crépy, though that is distinguished by having verses of songs as corner decorations. In the list of Dutch games of the Owl given by the Buijnsters,[24] an early example is that printed in Schiedam by Nicolaas Muys (1704-1757).[25] Examples of Type III appear in Holland throughout the 18th century, and continue into the early part of the 19th century. It is clear that Type III became the standard form of the game during the 18th century, no doubt because the increased payments to the pool improved the play, as discussed below.[26] Another differentiation from the Type II games is that the order of throws on the outer ring (but not the sequence of pay/take numbers) is rearranged; because all the throws concerned are doublets, this has no effect on the play. The Dutch Type III games are also distinguished by having a central image of an owl with a looking-glass; by contrast, the French versions have the image of a plate containing coins, as in the Veuve Petit game. Some but not all of these games provide the ass with a book.[27]

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[21] German National Museum, Nuremberg, in Leonie von Wilckens ed. *Spiel, Spiele, Kinderspiel*, exhibition catalogue. Nuremberg: 1986, cat. number 66.

[22] *Nouveau jeu de la chouette.* Paris: Jean Crépy, about 1720-1730. BnF, Estampes, Kh 446, tome 1 (format 4).

[23] *Nouveau jeu de la chouette*. Orléans: Letourmy, about 1780. Philadelphia Museum of Art, accession number 1958-133-2000.

[24] P J Buijnsters and L Buijnsters-Smets. Papertoys – *Speelprenten en papieren speelgoed in Nederland* (1640–1920). Zwolle: Waanders, 2005 pp. 104-109 (in Dutch).

[25] *Uylen-spel.* Schiedam: Nicolaas Muys (1794-1757). Museum Simon van Gijn, Dordrecht, inv. 7343 map k 6.

[26] For example, the Dutch games by Hamerstein (18th century), Hendriksen (1805), Holst (about 1850), Kannewet (1735-1780), de Jong (1842- 1873), Meyer (1756-1791), Mindermann (1818-1845), Rynders (1831-1854) and Wendel (1795-1818) are all of Type III; other games cited by the Buijnsters from this period have not been seen. The game dated 1817 by J Noman appears to have a misprint at space 45 (pay 6 instead of pay 5) but otherwise conforms to type.

[27] Those by Mindermann, Rynders and Wendel have a clear depiction of a book. The De Jong and Kannewet versions have a more schematic representation. Several others have no book.

Fig. 8– Le Jeu de la Chouette. Paris: Basset [Type IV]. (D'Allemagne, pl. 4)

The 'sanitisation' of Owl games by removal of the defecating man took place over some considerable time and was accompanied by other iconographic changes, such that the

games of Type IV show much variety. The earliest that has come to notice is a *Jeu de la Chouette* by Basset[28] dating from about 1775 (Fig. 8). The iconography begins by using subjects taken from the earlier French games but with reversed order from the 666 throw: pot and ladle, hen on nest, wire basket, soap bubbles, owl, lantern and tongs. There are some other correspondences but many of the images are new. Curiously, the ass denoting the maximum penalty (pay 12) has turned into a sheep. The central image is an owl with cornucopia of coins, rather than of the plate with stakes. However, the pay/take numbers and their throws are practically the same as those of the Veuve Petit game, if taken in anticlockwise rather than clockwise order.

The Brepols game shown in figure 5 is however more representative of Type IV. The iconography is only slightly reminiscent of the earlier games and the pay/take numbers have been revised. The soap bubbles still exist, as do the curry-comb and the spectacles, but many new images have been imported, including a sun with human face - a distinct widening of the symbolic range. [29]
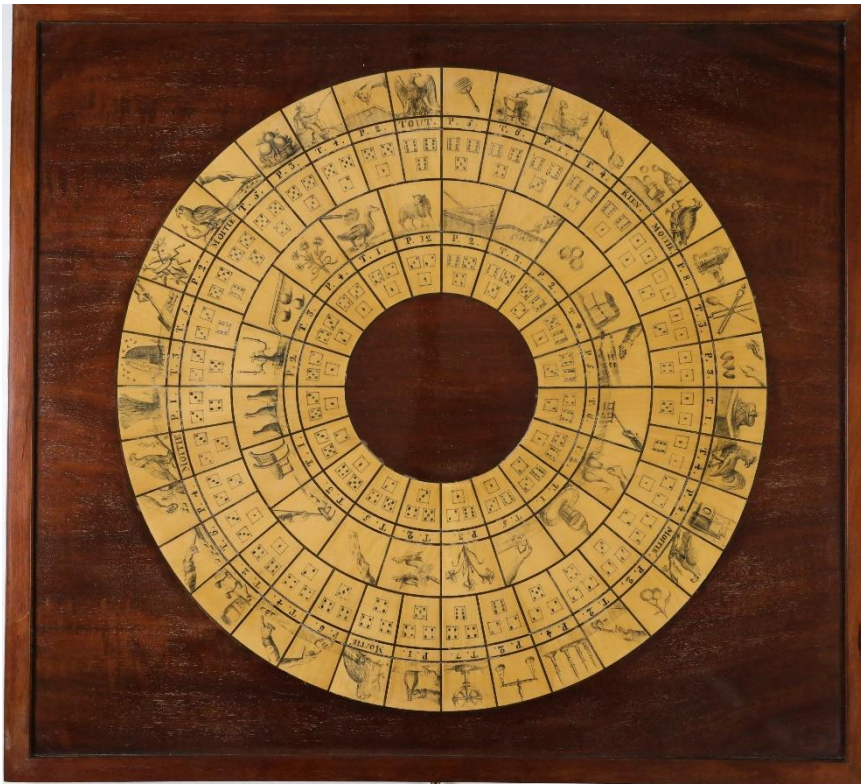

Fig. 9 – [Jeu de la Chouette]. Paris: Vaugeois [Type IV] (private collection)

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[28] A Paris: chez Basset, Md. d'Estampes et Fabricant de Papiers peints, rue St. Jacques au coin de celle des Mathurins, No. 64. J P Morgan Library, PML 88587. H. R. D'Allemagne, *Le noble jeu de l'oie*. Paris: Librairie Gründ, 1950, plate 4.

[29] Almost identical versions of this game were produced by Philippus Jacobus Brepols of Turnhout (1800-1833) and by his successors, Brepols and Dierckx Zoon (1833-1911); the earlier printing is found with the imprint of Jacobs and Meijers, booksellers of Amersfoort. A Rotterdam version was that of the print-maker Paulus Emans, published by Hendriksen. Images of all these may be downloaded from the Rijks Museum website.

Owl boards of inlaid wood were a feature of aristocratic multiple games tables of the late 18th and early 19th century. One such dating from 1812 is by Vaugeois of Paris and is shown in figure 9. Its sequence of pay/take numbers is practically that of the Basset version but there are several differences in the iconography. Most startling is that the owls have become eagles. In particular, the 666 throw is marked by an image of the Eagle of Jupiter, noted as being a badge of Napoleon I. The reason is thought to be that the table was commissioned from Vaugeois by his second wife, Marie Louise (1791-1847). The presence of the bee-hive on space 29 is probably a similar tribute to the Emperor. The iconography is also novel in that a serious attempt has been made to link the pay/take numbers with the numbers and kind of objects shown in the vignettes.

Games of Type V

An excellent introduction to the Italian form of the game is given by Alberto Milano, in an exhibition catalogue, which also illustrates several examples.[30]

We begin by examining the iconography of the Brambilla game shown in figure 6, the earliest dated example of any form of the Owl game. Ambrogio Brambilla was a painter and engraver, originally from Milan, active in Rome from 1575-1595.[31] As noted in the specification for Type V, the singlet and doublet throws are scattered promiscuously between the inner and outer rings.

The iconography has been studied by Fatih Parlak, who notes:[32]

> Other than the owl that occupies six compartments in the outer circle and the central circle, in all other compartments appear a variety of figures that include major characters from commedia dell'arte (such as Pantalone, Pedrolino, Francatripe, and Gratiano), minor characters in commedia (il Turco, Tedesco), characters from other comic street entertainments (Trastulo, Cloro), mythology (Cupido, Bacho, Satiro), street vendors (Limoni, Acquarolo, Fornaro), illustrations of vices and virtues (Onoranza, L'ignoranza), stage roles and carnival characters other than commedia (il Saltarino, il Babuno, il Barbaro), and figures referring to tarot cards (il Tempo, il Matto).

There are also images of material things: a coach, a bed and a mechanical trap for mice.

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[30] Alberto Milano (with Giuliano Crippa), *Giochi da Salotto, Giochi da Osteria nella vita milanese dal Cinquecento all'Ottocento.* [Catalogue of an exhibition at the Palazzo Morando, Milan]. Milan: Edizioni Gabriele Mazzotta, 2012, cat. nos. 10-14.

[31] The British Museum has an example of the game with his monogram: lettering in the centre *Romae Baptiste Parmensis formis 1589* gives the date and identifies Giovanni Battista di Lazzaro Panzera, an engraver and printer from Parma who had a shop in the Borgo in Rome (British Museum Inv. No: 1869,0410.2460.+). The copper plate is still in existence and there have been numerous reprints including a late 19th-century example in the British Museum, blind-stamped *Regia calcographia di Roma*. These omit the reference to Panzera but retain the monogram. All these impressions have an error: the throw 533 is missing – it should appear at the 'Brentador space' – but that has 542 in the original and 553 in later impressions.

[32] *The Image of the Turk in Early Modern Board Games and Playing Cards*. Barcelona: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, PhD thesis, 2019, pp. 148-157.
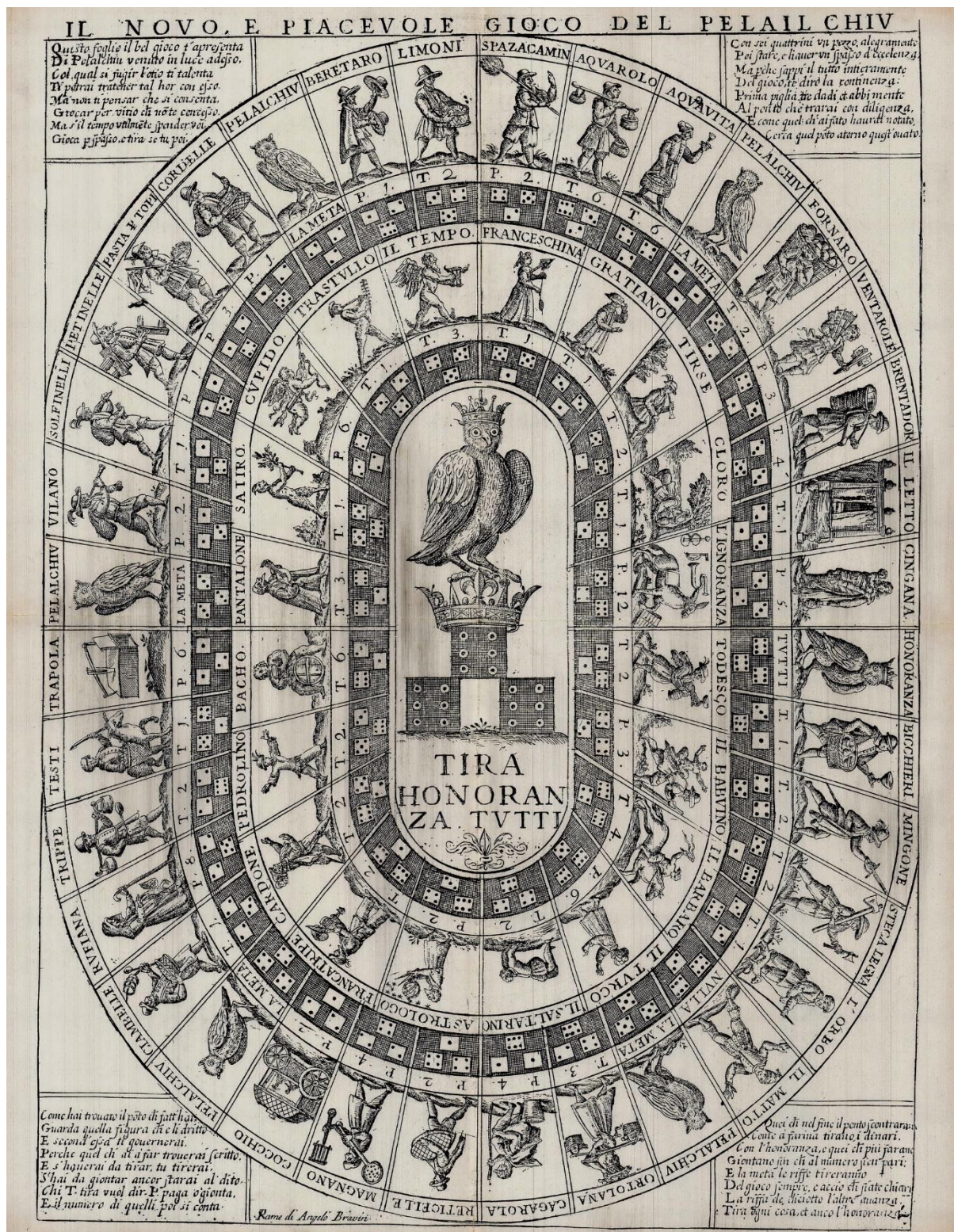
Fig. 10 – Il Novo et Piacevole Gioco del Pela il Chiu. Venice: Angelo Bravin, middle of the 17th century [Type V]

A re-working of the Brambilla game by Angelo Bravin, an engraver active in Venice between 1625 and 1675, converts the game to vertical format, but maintains the placement of the (H)onoranza space at the centre of a long edge (Fig. 10). The subject matter of the

iconography is in exact correspondence with the Brambilla game, its assumed model, and the ordering of the images is the same, though they are not exact copies.[33] An important difference concerns the images for L'Ignoranza: though both games depict an ass with musical instruments in the background, the Brambilla version shows further instruments on the ground. Both versions show a large book, open on the ground. Here, though, the Bravin version reveals what could well be lines of music. If so, this would be a clear reference to a tale of Till Eulenspiegel, in which an ass is taught to read from a psalter, as will be discussed later.

The Galleria Estense in Modena houses a number of woodblock matrices that were the property of the Tipografia Soliani, founded in Modena by Bartolomeo Soliani in 1646, and continuing in business for some 340 years.[34] Among these is a game of *Pela il Chiu* [legno Imm. Varie 203] whose iconographic subjects are exactly those of the Brambilla game, though differing in the ordering and – in some cases – in the spelling of the captions: for example, 'solfinelli' [seller of brimstone matches] becomes 'sofanelli'. [35] The game is presented in vertical format, though the Onoranza space remains at the centre of a long side, as in the Brambilla version. The graphic treatment is simplified to suit the woodblock medium, in place of copper engraving. The game is discussed by Alberto Milano, who makes the comparison with the Brambilla game but notes that another, possibly earlier, block in the collection [legno Imm. Varie 209] presents the same figures, though in reverse.[36] The collection of woodblocks at Modena includes another game of the Owl [legno Imm. Varie 201] in which all representation, except for that of the owl spaces and the central decoration, is omitted in favour of a scheme of dots to display the pay/take numbers. White dots outlined in black signify how many quattrini to take, while black dots similarly signify how many to pay for each throw. Alberto Milano also illustrates examples of the game from Florence (18th century), from Padua[37] and a game reprinted from a matrix probably made in Bologna at the beginning of the 17th century.[38] All have similar iconography to that of the Brambilla game, though in some the images appear in the reverse order and there are occasional interchanges. The Bertarelli collection in Milan possesses, among other versions of Pela il Chiu, an example reprinted from a block by Valentin Zorzi dated 1648: it is very similar to the Bravin version.[39]

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[33] Except that Bravin correctly has the missing 533 throw at Brentador.

[34] Ernesto Milano, *Annali della Tipografia Soliani.* Modena: Mucchi Editore, 1986.

[35] A similar but not identical game, not attributed to Soliani, is in the British Museum: 18,930,331.56
It has a remarkable number of errors of duplication of throws.

[36] Soprintendenza per i beni artistici e storici di Modena e Reggio, *I Legni incisi della Galleria estense: quattro secoli di stampa nell'Italia settentrionale.* Modena: Mucchi, 1986, p. 167 and plate 103-1.

[37] Woodcut signed Cadorin: Alberto Milano op. cit., cat. no. 12. The Cadorini brothers were active 'appresso il [Palazzo] Bo' in the middle of the 17th century. The same address appears on a game by Mattio (sic) Cadorin, *Il Nuovo et Piacevole Giuoco Romano*, British Museum: 1893,0331.59

[38] Alberto Milano, op. cit., cat. no. 14.

[39] Ilio Negri and Virgilio Vercelloni, *I giochi di dadi, d'azzardo e di passatempo di gentiluomini e dei pirati*, Milan: Lerici, 1958, pl.B a1 ; Thierry Depaulis, 'Jeux de hasard sur papier… ' (1987), op. cit., fig. 5.

We thus find in games of Type V, with the notable exception of the version without illustrations, a nearly uniform corpus of imagery. They come from a wide range of Northern Italian cities, with the addition of Rome. It is clear that much copying was involved in the preparation of the matrices but it is of course not possible to be definite about the sequence of dates. The role of the Remondini in reprinting examples of the game of *Pela il Chiu* (and others) without deleting details of the original publisher is to be noted as complicating the study of these prints.

The sources of this imagery are obscure. Ambrogio Brambilla was known for his production of 'popular prints', including *L'Arboro della Pazzia* [the Tree of Folly] and the *Venditori ambulanti nelle vie di Roma* [Street vendors of Rome], so it is perhaps not surprising that popular representations of human figures form the majority of subjects in his game, though they do not seem to be copied directly from his other works. It is, however, a disparate collection of images.

Fatih Parlak claims to see some significance in the choice of imagery:

> The game designed by Brambilla loosely suggests in the undertones a reward of virtues and punishment of vices, a typical theme commonly used in early modern games by game designers for the justification and existence of play. Onoranza (honour) is the most praised virtue as the given privilege for winning the game. Mythological figures like Bacho (Bacchus), il Tempo (Time), and Satiro (Satyr) are also favoured by Brambilla as players earn coins, which can be linked to his praise of the Roman past and earthly pleasures in his engravings. In addition, a similar preferential treatment is applied to famous *commedia* characters like Pantalone, Cardone, and Pedrolino. In contrast, Ignorance is highly disfavoured, as well as the defecating lady (Cagarola), the monkey, and the Turk.

Examination of the pay/take numbers gives only limited support to this contention. The largest payments to the pool are shown in the following table:

space	title	throw	pay
56	L'IGNORANZA	654	12
15	RVFIANA	522	8
18	TRAPOLA	211	6
40	IL TURCO	665	6
49	CVPIDO	432	6
36	CINGANA	332	5

while the largest drawings from the pool, apart from the Owl throws, are:

29	ACQUAROLO	632	-6
46	BACHO	631	-6

It is difficult to see any deep system in these assignations.

Although the mixture of subjects seems perverse, such mixtures are known in other game sheets. For example, in another game by Angelo Bravin, the *Novo e Dilettevole Giocho del Barone* ['New and pleasant game of the Baron' – a race game played with dice on a spiral track], we see a number of objects familiar from the Brambilla game: the *Trapola* [trap] (to which the player is directed should he or she fall on the space showing a mouse) and the *Cochio* [coach], whence the player is directed to the palace. Other spaces also have familiar images: the *Barbaro* space depicts a racehorse and jockey, so that the player is directed to the *Palio* [the cloth given to the winner of the traditional race in Siena].[40] The *Zingana* [*Cingana*, gypsy] begs one stake from each player, while the *Matto* [fool] and the *Cieco* [*L'Orbo*, the blind man] are also present. Many of the images chosen for these spaces conform to an internal logic.

Another Italian game to feature a heterogenous collection of objects is the lottery game, *Il Giuoco Romano,* which requires players to stake on a game sheet bearing small pictures which are to be matched with cards drawn from a bag containing a corresponding set of images.[41] These images include common objects, animals, persons – among whom are street sellers – and symbols of wider significance, such as the sun personified. Here, the virtue of heterogeneity is that it helps in matching the images during play.

Against this background, the collection of images found in the Owl games appears less bizarre. It may be that Brambilla simply added *commedia d'arte* figures and street vendors to a known range of images, being familiar with the types of personages concerned and thinking that they would enhance the popularity of his version of the game. This approach, of course, would not prevent the inclusion of images regarded as particularly significant for the game, such as the ass to represent ignorance. These considerations perhaps suggest that Brambilla's might not have been the first version of the game, despite the claim of novelty, though no precursor has survived.

A feature of all the Italian games is that the winning owl wears a crown and in most but not all games one or more crowned owls form the central decoration, with the phrase '*Tira tutti con honoranza'* or '*Tira honoranza tutti*' [take all with honour]. The crowned owl is not found on French and German games but is a frequent feature of Dutch games of all Types.

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[40] This has been noted by Parlak (op. cit.) but the name on the space refers to the Barbary horse, not a 'barbarian', as he translated it.

[41] For example, the example in the British Museum: 1893,0331.59 Another example is in the BnF (T. Depaulis, 'L'illusion d'un passé : fable express', *Le Vieux Papier*, fasc. 347, January 1998, p. 40-43). The *Giuoco Romano* is, like the Catalan *Auca* and like *Biribissi*, of which is it a slightly less sophisticated version, a lottery 'of immediate result', as is Roulette.
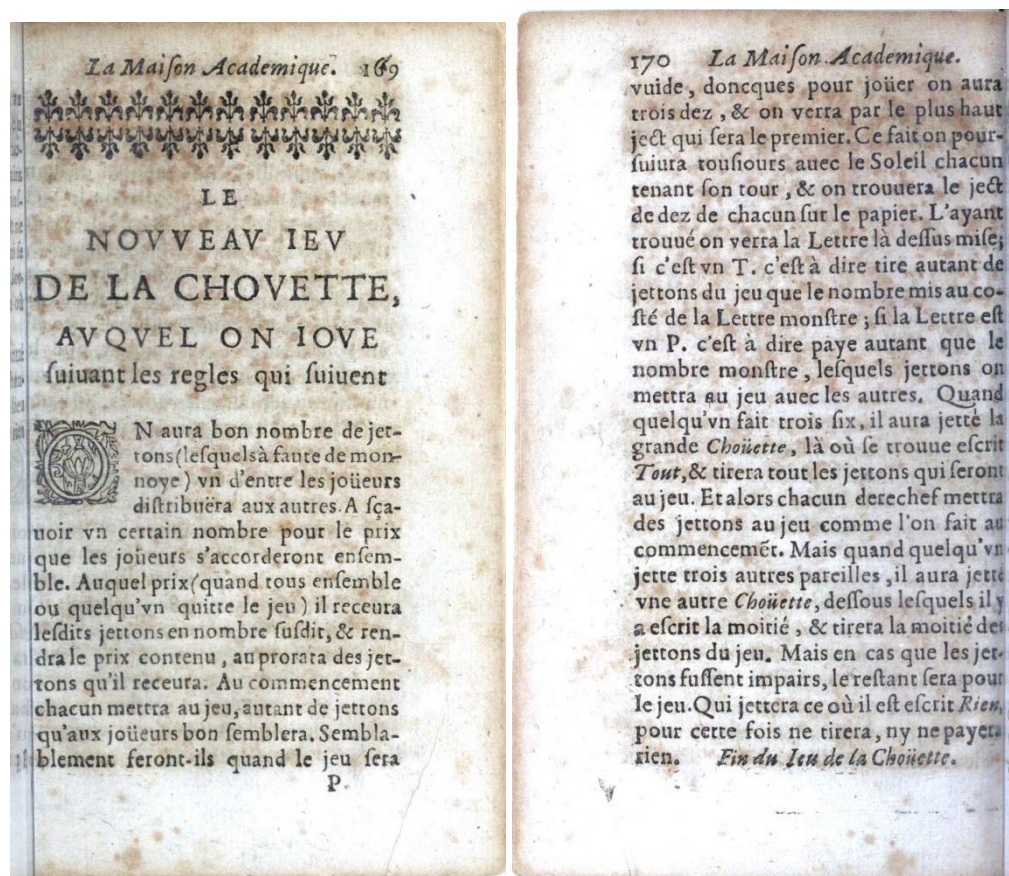
4. Rules of the game

Fig. 11 – 'LE NOVVEAU IEV de la Choüette, auquel on ioüe suiuant les Regles qui suiuent', in La Maison academique, *1654. (BnF Gallica)*

A clear statement of the rules is printed on the game by Veuve Petit. These rules are repeated word-for-word in the 1654 edition of *La maison academique* (Fig. 11).[42] They specify, with admirable clarity, as follows:

> You need a good number of jettons (in place of money) which one of the players will distribute to the others. This number represents the prize which the players will agree together. Of this prize, (when anyone or everyone leaves the game) they will receive a proportion pro-rata to the number of jettons that they have. At the beginning of the game, each player will put [into the pool] as many jettons as the players think fit. They will do the same whenever the pool becomes empty.

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[42] La Marinière. *La maison academique : contenant un recueil general de tous les jeux divertissans pour se rejouyr agreablement dans les bonnes compagnies / par le sieur D.L.M.* [de La Marinière]. A Paris: chez Robert de Nain et Marin Leché, M.DC. LIV, pp.169-170. Available on Gallica. Author's translation.

Then to play you take three dice and the highest throw determines who goes first. The throw rotates in the direction of the Sun [clockwise] and each throw is to be found on the paper. Having found the throw, you see the letter placed above it. If it is a T, that means take as many jettons from the game as shown by the number beside it. If it is a P, that means pay as many jettons as the number shows, putting them on the game with the others. When someone throws three sixes, he has thrown the great *Chouette*, where *Tout* is written, and will take all the jettons on the game. And then everyone will put jettons on the game as at the beginning. But when someone throws three other equal numbers, he has thrown another *Chouette*, below which *La Moitié* is written, and will take half the jettons on the game. But in case the number of jettons is odd, the odd one will stay on the game. Whoever throws where *Rien* is written will neither take nor pay for that turn.

Rules to the same effect are found on the other versions, in French, German or Dutch. However, where the Italian versions have rules, they are in verse form, taken from the four corners of the Brambilla game. Michael Bury notes that the language of their inscriptions points to a source in north-east Italy, which would be consistent with the range of places of publication noted above – and in particular with Bologna (see note 1).[43]

> *Questo foglio il bel gioco t'apresenta / Di Pelalchiv venuto in luce adesso / Col qual si fugir l'otio ti talenta / Ti potrai tratener tal hor con esso / Ma qui non ti pensar che si consenta / Giocar per vitio che no(n) te concesso / Ma s'il tempo utilme(n)te spende voi / Gioca per spasso e tira se tu poi.*

This sheet presents you with the beautiful game of Pluck the Owl which has now come to light and with which, if you like to escape from idleness, you can sometimes entertain yourself. But do not think that here it is permitted to play for vice because it is not allowed. Instead, if you want to spend the time usefully, play for fun and roll the dice.

> *Con sei quattrini un pezzo alegramente / Poi stare, e tener un spasso d'eccelenza / Ma perchè sappi il tutto intieramente / Del gioco ti dirò la continenza / Prima piglia tre dadi et habbi mente / Al ponto che frarai con diligenza / E come quel ch'ai fatto haverai notato / Cerca quel ponto attorno a quest'ovato.*

With six *quattrini*[44] you can merrily stay a little and have excellent entertainment. But so that you know everything, I'll tell you the content of the game. First take three dice and diligently remember the point you make. And when you have noted the point that you made, look for that point in this oval.

> *Come hai trovato il punto che fatt'hai / Guarda quella figura di diritto / E second'essa ti governerai / Per che quel ch'ai a far troverai scritto / E s' haverai da tirar, tu tirerai.*

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[43] Michael Bury, *The Print in Italy 1550-1620*. London: British Museum, 2001.
[44] The *quattrino* was a copper coin, equal to one third of a silver *soldo*. It was also the stake specified in the dice games of Mitelli at the end of the 18th century.

/ S'hai da giontar anchor starai al ditto / Chi T. tira vuol dir. P. paga o gionta / E Q. quatrini il numero poi si conta;

Once you have found the point that you made, look at that figure and act accordingly, because you will find written what you have to do; and if you have to take you will take [from the pool]. If you have to add, you will do as indicated; T means *tira* [take] P means *paga o giunta* [pay or add] and Q the number of *quattrini* to be counted.

Quei che nel fine il punto scontrarano / Come a farina tirano i denari / Con l'honoranza e quei che più farano / Giontano sin che al numero sien pari; / E la meta le riffe tireranno. / Del gioco sempre e acciò che siate chiari / La riffa de diciotto l'altre avanza / Tira ogni cosa et anco l'honoranza.

Those who in the end find the point, as at *Farina* take the coins, with the *honoranza*. And those who would play on must add in equal numbers. And the *riffe* take half. For clarity, in the game the *riffa* of eighteen surpasses all other throws and takes everything and also the *honoranza*.

These rules are useful in suggesting that the initial stake was six quattrini per player, giving a pool of 24 if four were playing. However, some obscurities in this explanation of the rules need to be addressed.[45]

Riffa [plural *riffe*] is Italian for a throw of three of a kind, recalling an obscure meaning of the English word 'raffle':

> (a) A game of chance played with three dice, the winner being the person to throw three of a kind or, failing that, the highest instance of two of a kind. *Obsolete.*
> (b) A throw of two or three of a kind (originally in the game of raffle).[46]

La Farina was a dice game, with a similar rule, that a given throw took all the stakes. *Dadi da farina* [dice for farina] are mentioned in Citolini's *Tipocosmia* of 1561.[47] These dice are called *farinacci* [Spanish: *harinillas*] and their nature is specified in a Spanish-Italian dictionary of 1638: [48]

> *Harinillas: si chiamo I farinacci, cioé i sei dadi segnati da una banda sola*

and further clarified in another dictionary of the time:[49]

> *A kind of Italian dye* [die]: *Farinacci, sono sei dadi segnato ciascuno solamente d'un punto; six dez marquez seulement d'un point, fort usitez en Italie.* [six dice marked only on one face, much used in Italy].

Another Italian game of three dice, *Carica l'Asino* [Load the Donkey] has a more explicit reference in its rules to the *Farina* game:

> *Il gioco e simile a quello da Farina perche finche non si fa il punto che leva tutti i denari non si puo finire.* [The game is like that of *Farina* because it does not finish unless the point is made that takes all the money].

Of this game, Alberto Milano writes that the oldest example is that published by Giovanni Antonio De Paoli at Rome in 1590, thus almost contemporary with the Brambilla game. [50]

Ulrich Schädler has clarified[51] that the game of *Farina* is the same as the game of *Schimmel.* He notes that a [later] Italian-German dictionary has the entry:[52]

> *Giuocare a farina* oder *a farinacci* = Schimmeln

Schimmel is played with six dice, each having only a single face marked with a number, the numbers running from 1 to 6. An all-white throw (no number showing) is called *Schimmel* ['white horse'] and no doubt the Italian version got its name, meaning 'flour', from such a throw. To finish the game, a throw is required where the sum of numbers showing is exactly the number of stakes in the pool.

The rule for the Brambilla Game of the Owl, requiring a throw of 666 to finish, runs counter to that of the Veuve Petit and other games, which allows for cashing up whenever the pool is exhausted, so that those players who wish to leave the game may do so at that point. The Italian rule could well be used to trap the unwary into a long game where refreshment of the pool was needed several times, perhaps magnifying the stakes unexpectedly. Pluck the Owl, indeed!

5.   The size of the pool

We now turn to the analysis of the playing experience. In general, the game rules do not specify the initial size of the pool. The Brambilla game suggests six stakes per player but an initial stake of a dozen from each player is often specified for other pool games, so that if the game were designed for four players, then the initial pool size might be 24 or 48. The effect of these different pool sizes on the Owl game is considerable. At any point in the

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[50] British Museum 1869, 0410.2466

[51] Private communication, October 2020

[52] Nicolo di Castelli, *Nuovo dizionario italiano tedesco e tedesco italiano … ora esattamente corretto ed arrichito von Philipp Jakob Flathe.* Leipzig: M. G. Weidmanns Erben, 1782, col. 1137.

game, the expected change in the size of the pool with the next throw is a balance between the net effects of doublet and singlet throws, and the effect of withdrawals from the pool arising from owl throws, which are proportional to the size of the pool. The general expression for the expected change in pool size per throw, in the absence of a 666 win, is:

$$(-5p/2 + 3d + 6s)/216$$

where p is the pool size, d is the algebraic sum of the pay/take numbers for doublets and s is the corresponding sum for singlets. The first term represents the owl throws, other than 666: there are 5 of these, each halving the pool. The second and third terms represent the average net payments/drawings from other throws. The value of p for which this expression is zero gives the equilibrium size of the pool: whatever the pool size at a particular point in the game, it will tend on average to this equilibrium value with subsequent throws, unless of course there is a 666 win. For the earlier games, this is smaller than the likely starting pool: 17 for the Type I games and only 12 for the Brambilla game. The increase in the pay numbers in the Type III games has a striking effect, raising the equilibrium pool size to over 70 in the Koene game, with a similar result of about 60 for the Type IV Brepols game. Evidently, experience showed that this gave a better game. Some of the extra pay numbers appear on doublets, some on singlets. It seems unlikely that the modification was informed by combinatorial theory.

6. Simulating the play

It is by no means easy to foresee what will be the effect on the playing experience of the differences identified above. For that reason, the game was simulated on a desktop computer. The most obvious approach is the so-called Monte Carlo method, in which the throw of the dice is simulated using the random number function in the programming language – here, Visual Basic – and the resulting throws are used to increase or decrease the pool according to the rules of the particular version of the game. In the implementation, runs of up to 10,000 games were used, the run time being of order five minutes.

An alternative approach relies on the fact that each successive throw is an independent random event, such that the probability of an outcome (e.g 'take 2 from the pool') does not depend on the past history of the throw record. Given the starting size of the pool, one can determine the probability of all possible outcomes of the first throw. The same set of probabilities can then be applied for each of these outcomes, giving the probabilities of the possible outcomes of the second throw, and so on. This approach is often called a stochastic model. Such a model was implemented for the various versions of the Owl game on an Excel spreadsheet, which could carry the number of throws to several hundred and beyond.

Neither approach is in any sense original, though care is needed in building the models. To pick up possible mistakes, the two models were tested against each other to ensure that, within the statistical variation inherent in the Monte Carlo method, they agreed on the frequencies of the pool sizes resulting from a fixed number of throws.

The trade-off between different aspects of the playing experience is clearly shown in the following table, based on Monte-Carlo runs of 10,000 games of each kind:

Poolsize 48

	average ending throw	% of games ending 666	average 666 win	'long' games
Brambilla	96	45	41	30
Petit	95	45	44	36
Koene	161	76	72	464
Brepols	154	73	63	382

Poolsize 24

	average ending throw	% of games ending 666	average 666 win	'long' games
Brambilla	72	34	30	17
Petit	70	33	35	23
Koene	141	67	64	398
Brepols	133	63	55	320

The first column shows that, irrespective of initial pool size, the average length of the later games is much greater than that of the Veuve Petit or Brambilla games, owing to the changes in pay/take numbers. The Koene and Brepols games are less likely to fizzle out as the pool is reduced until it is completely exhausted by a chance 'take' throw: indeed, the second column shows that a 666 win occurs less than half of the time in the Veuve Petit and Brambilla games. The final column gives the number of games in the samples of 10,000 that continue for many throws without exhaustion of the pool or a 666 win. These 'long' games are here defined as over 500 throws – perhaps two hours of play! The table shows that the positive features of the later games in terms of excitement are somewhat counterbalanced by the possibility of a long session before a result.

7. The links with Till Eulenspiegel

We now turn to a completely different aspect of the game: the links with the tales of Till Eulenspiegel.[53] As we have seen, the Early German versions of the game call themselves after Till Eulenspiegel and the later Dutch games, while not using that name directly, emphasize the connection by the central device of an owl with a looking-glass.

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[53] Information on these tales is taken from the excellent study by Paul Oppenheimer, *A Pleasant Vintage of Till Eulenspiegel […], 95 of His Tales*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1972. This translates the original edition published by Johannes Greininger of Strasburg in 1515 and reproduces its woodcuts.
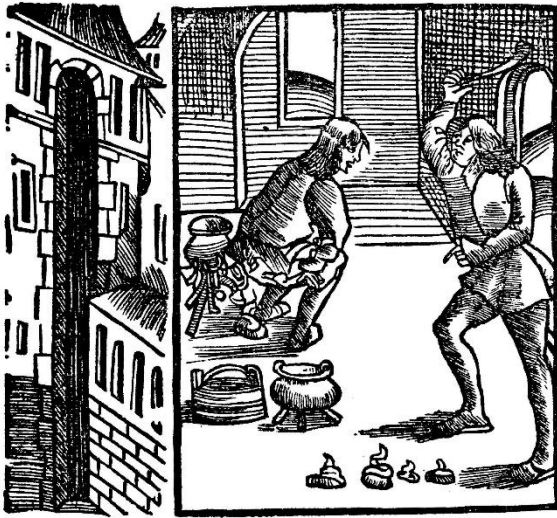
80. How Eulenspiegel took his leave of Rostock.

Fig. 12 – Woodcut reproduced from the original edition Ein kurtzweilig Lesen von Dyl Vlenspiegel. *Strasburg: Johannes Grüninger, 1515.*

In games of Types I, II and III, the image of the pile of ordure in space 45 (the defecating man) is revoltingly but accurately similar to that illustrated in the woodcuts for tales 16, 45, 51, 68, 76, 80 that appeared in the printed edition of 1515 (Fig. 12). The same is true for the equally revolting image in space 27 of games of type I and type III. Several other tales involve ordure in various ways and one may say that leaving a pile of it was one of Eulenspiegel's 'visiting cards. Another was the chalked sign of an owl and a looking-glass.

29. How Eulenspiegel taught an ass to read from an old psalter at Erfurt.

Fig. 13 – Woodcut reproduced from the original edition Ein kurtzweilig Lesen von Dyl Vlenspiegel. *Strasburg: Johannes Grüninger, 1515.*

One might expect that a game so clearly associated with his exploits would illustrate them in its other iconography but such does not seem to be the case – except for the ass that denotes the largest pay number. Here, as noted earlier, the Italian games furnish – by depiction of musical instruments - a unique clue that this is a musical ass. The earliest German and French examples simply show the ass with a book. Tale number 29 is entitled: 'How Eulenspiegel taught an ass to read from an old psalter at Erfurt.' He laid oats between each of the pages and the ass tossed over the pages with its mouth. The depiction of the psalter in the accompanying woodcut has two broad bands of music, compared with five in the Bravin illustration, but the link is clear enough - see figure 13.

Against this interpretation, David Paisley considers that the relationship between the game and the Eulenspiegel histories is nothing more than a simple change of name to cash in on their popularity, with nothing more than the verbal connection.[54] He seems not to have studied the iconography in any detail. Of course, it is perfectly possible that the original form of the game had no link with Eulenspiegel, but Paisley offers no evidence of such a form.

8. Origins of the game

We now move to an area of discussion that is distinctly speculative: what were the origins of the game? The Brambilla game, as previously noted, is the oldest extant example: with a clear date of 1589, it has been generally accepted as the original version and the game has therefore been thought to have come from Italy.[55] Indeed, until the comparatively recent discovery of the example by the Veuve Petit, where the woodblock probably was made by her husband, the *imagier* Charles Petit, active between 1607 and 1635, all surviving examples from other countries were very much later, so the influence of the early Italian impressions was strong. Indeed, even with this early French example in view, Thierry Depaulis considered that the origins of the game were clearly Italian.[56] On the other hand, Georg Himmelheber, in a brief discussion of Dice Board Games, notes the game published by Paulus Fürst under the title *Eulen Spiegel Spiel* and remarks that this title, as well as the game's great popularity in Holland, suggests an origin in Lower Germany.[57]

If we discount evidence based on the dating of such few examples as survive, the most natural cradle for the game is Germany, where the Till Eulenspiegel tales were first published. Subsequent editions appeared in many European languages – but not Italian.[58]

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[54] David PAISEY: How Eulenspiegel was pinned to the wall in 1729. In: W. J. Jones, W. A. Kelly, F. Shaw (eds.): 'Vir ingenio mirandus.' Studies presented to John L. Flood. Vol. II. Göppingen: Kümmerle 2003 [Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik 710/2], pp. 705-725. (My thanks go to Jonas Richter for this reference and other useful comments).

[55] Jean Marie Lhôte, *Histoire des jeux de société.* Paris: Flammarion, 1994, p. 436.

[56] Thierry Depaulis: 'Trois jeux…', op. cit. 2011. p.43.

[57] Georg Himmelheber, *Spiele -Gesellschaftsspiele aus einen Jahrtausend*, München and Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1972, p. 145. Himmelheber speaks of 'Niederdeutschland', in reference to those regions where Low-German was spoken.

[58] Oppenheimer, op. cit., p. xviii.

Editions of Eulenspiegel remained popular throughout the early modern period in Germany, Holland, Flanders, France and England. The remarkable consistency of images, pay/take numbers and arrangement of the throws in Owl games across the first four of these countries strongly suggests a common origin different from any Italian model; England seems to have known the game only as an import.[59]

The Italian games do not differentiate between doublets and singlets in placing the throw numbers on the two bands, whereas all other games place the 30 doublets on the outer ring, with the six owls, and the 20 singlets all on the inner ring. This arrangement greatly facilitates finding the correct cell during play. Normally, one would class this as an improvement in the game and regard it as evidence for a later date. However, this is negated by the fact that the Italian versions all have 20 cells in the inner band, when - without restricting this to singlets - the distribution of cells between the bands is arbitrary. So, to have exactly 20 cells in the inner band is in fact evidence of copying the overall design from another source.

It seems likely, then, that Brambilla adapted an early example from elsewhere for his Italian market, selecting iconography that would be appealing to his audience, using both street vendors and *commedia d'arte* figures, but adding a few images from other games in Italian circulation. Apart from the owls, the only image common to the Veuve Petit and the Brambilla games is that of the ass, given the symbolic caption of Ignoranza. The image of the defecating man was replaced by a less offensive one of a woman using a lavatory. The word used in the caption (La Cagorola) seems to signify diarrhoea, which suggests that Brambilla had not appreciated the significance of the original image.[60]

Another difficulty with an Italian origin is that the owls are crowned in all Italian versions, and indeed associated with *Honoranza,* whereas the general belief in Italy is that the owl is stupid, giving rise to such insults as 'stupid owl' to this day. As noted above, crowned owls are also found in many Dutch games, perhaps indicating that Brambilla's presumed source was from Holland.

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[59] In London, Michael Hennekin advertised: 'At the Great Print and Toy Shop, The Corner of Hemming's Row in St. Martin's-Lane […] A new Winter's Play, call'd Jeu de la Choette, alias Eulen Spiegele, finely engrave, with a Description in French how to play it with 3 Dice.' Price 1s. *Daily Journal*, 15 October 1723.
[60] Teofilo Folengo, *Le maccheronee (lessico).* Bari: G. Laterza & figli, 1911.

9. Discussion

Fig. 14 – Different versions of the Ass space: from left to right and top to bottom: Veuve Petit, Fürst, Jegher, Mindermann, Brambilla, Bravin.

The Game of the Owl presents many points of interest. One is to note how the copying of the game is influenced by whether the copier recognises the significance of a particular detail, as shown by the succession of images for the Ass in figure 14. On the other hand, the importance of the pay/take numbers seems to have been recognised, so that they remained virtually unchanged across national borders and through time until the need for a change in playing characteristics was acted on. The iconographic subjects were also largely kept, though perhaps more out of inertia than out of any supposed significance. The enduring evidence on space 45 of Till Eulenspiegel's unsavoury habits is hard to explain otherwise, since the link to his exploits was not made clear in a number of games which retained that image. Even when the 'sanitised' versions of the game came in, the process was gradual, not as if there was a sudden revulsion.

There is unfortunately no evidence of the kind of people who played the game, nor of where it was played. Often the format of prints gives a clue to the intended market. Here, however, the same game appears in contrasting formats, such as that of the Jegher game, a woodcut 42 x 33cm, and that of the corresponding Visscher game, a copper engraving of 50 x 40 cm. The need for detail in the woodcuts, particularly the need to show the dice throws legibly, no doubt militated against smaller formats.

As a gambling game, it was probably more played in taverns than in the home but there is no evidence either way. The rules of the Italian version warn against playing for the sake of vice and certainly the suggested stake of a quattrino would be too small for serious gambling. Nevertheless, games of dice were frequently prohibited under heavy penalty, notably in Italy, though the Game of the Owl is not singled out for special mention; of course, the need for frequent prohibition is testimony to their popularity. The presence of the game in tables designed for the French aristocracy shows that there was no social barrier to its acceptance.[61] One can also cite the magnificent Jeu de la chouette in ebony and ivory showing the crowned cipher of Louis XIV in the corners and the arms of France in the centre.[62] And Piero Salvetti (1609-1652) writes, in his *Lamento per la perdita di un grillo* (1645):

> In prima i re giochino alla bassetta
> I ricchi ai pelacchiù, ma con disdetta
> I nobili al barone

(Firstly, Kings play Bassetta / The rich play Pela Chiu, but have bad luck / the Nobles play Barone).

Although the tone is ironic, and this should not be taken literally, it does indicate that the game was played by the upper classes. Nevertheless, the game had wide popularity, as evidenced by its continued appearance in the Remondini catalogues, with the Game of the Goose, until 1793.[63]

The division of the chances into a doublet/triplet band and a separate singlet band occurs from early in the 17th century, well before any theory of probability was in circulation. As suggested above, this was probably simply for convenience in finding the throws; indeed, there is no evidence from the distribution of the pay/take numbers that any distinction in treatment was made between doublets and singlets. However, gamblers of the time knew by experience that doublets appeared less frequently than throws in which the points were different. In fact, the question of the odds of throwing doublets was one that stimulated the development of modern theories of probability. In 1654, Antoine Gombaud, Chevalier de Méré, a French nobleman with an interest in gaming, called Pascal's attention to an apparent contradiction concerning a popular dice game. The game consisted in throwing a pair of dice 24 times; the problem was to decide whether or not to bet even money on the occurrence of at least one double six during the 24 throws. An established gambling rule led de Méré to believe that betting on this would be profitable, but his own experience

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[61] See, for example, Savelli's summary of laws relating to Florence: *Pratica vniuersale del dottor Marc'Antonio Sauelli da Modigliana.* Firenze: per Giuseppo Cocchini, nella Stamperia della Stella, 1665, pp. 202-205. This has a reference to the Farina game: '*E che il giuoco de dadi anco con carte sia proibito per tutto sotto pena di scudi 100 d'oro, perdita del giucato eccettuati di tavoliere e giuco detto farina* […]' [And that the game of dice also with cards be prohibited throughout under penalty of 100 gold scudi [and] loss of the gaming equipment, excepting tables [backgammon] and the game called farina].

[62] Versailles, Musée national du château, V 5816 : see Ève Netchine (dir.), *Jeux de princes, jeux de vilains*, Paris, BnF, 2009, No. 112.

[63] Alberto Milano, 'Antichi giochi su carta', in *Come giocavamo*, Milan: Alinari, 1984, p. 22.

indicated the opposite. This problem and others posed by de Méré led to the celebrated correspondence between Pascal and Fermat in which the fundamental principles of probability theory were formulated.[64]
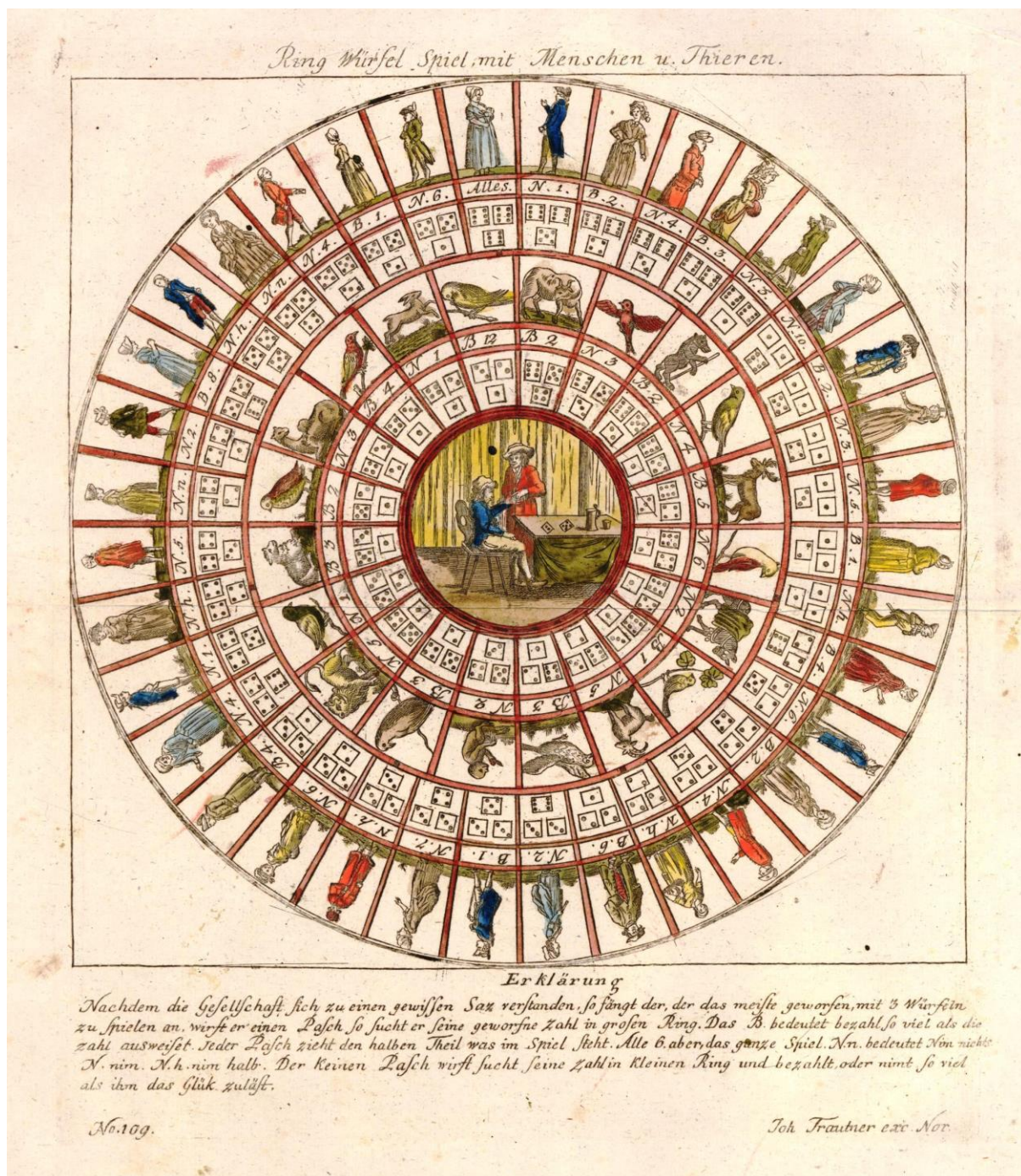

Fig. 15 – Ring Würfel Spiel mit Menschen und Thieren*, Nuremberg: Johann Trautner, 18th century (© Trustees of the British Museum)*

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[64] *Œuvres de Fermat* (ed. Tannery and Henry) Paris: Gauthier-Villars, Vol. II, 1894, pp. 288–314.
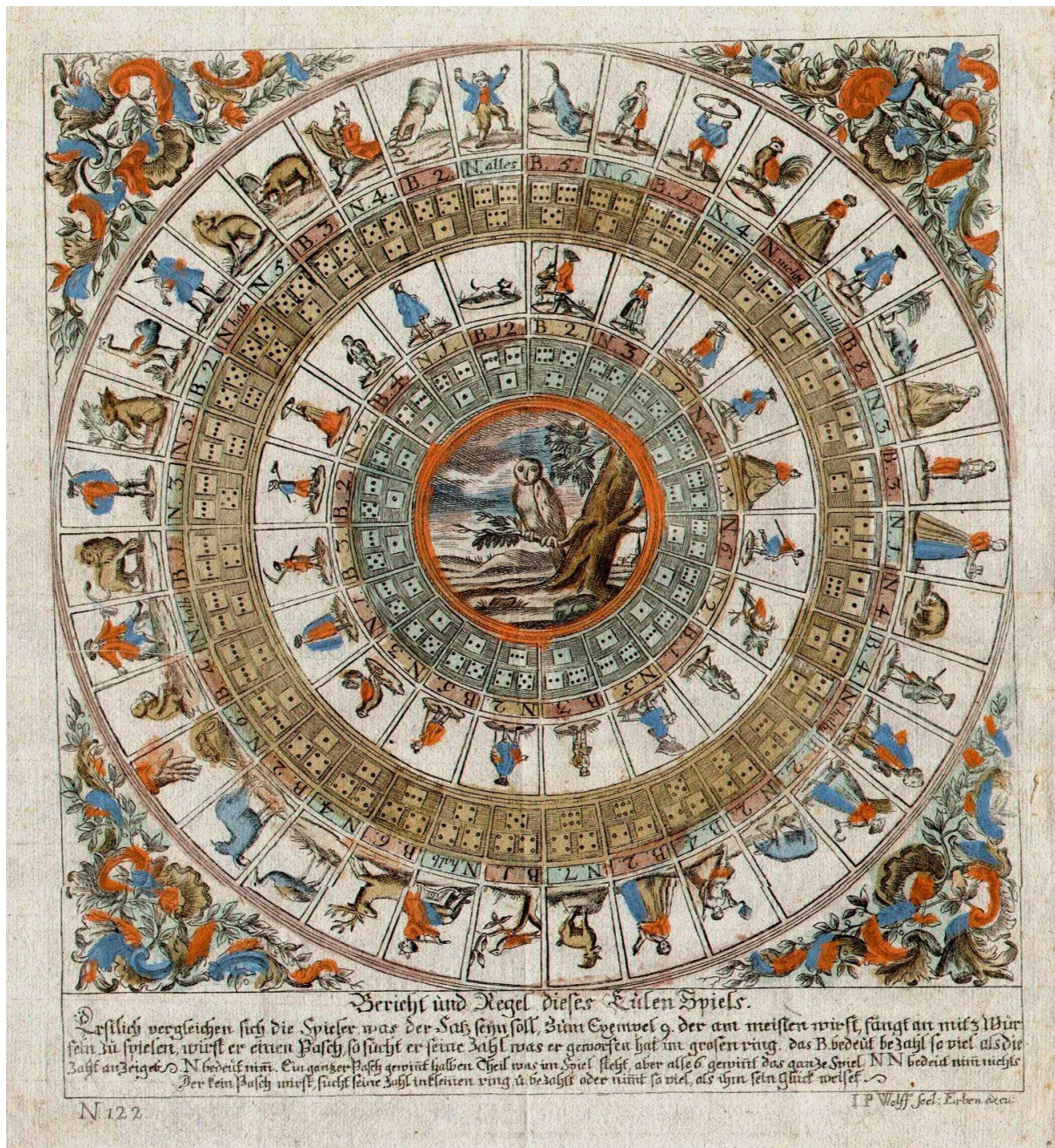
Fig. 16 – Eulen Spiel*, Nuremberg: Heirs of Johann Peter Wolff, 18th century (private collection)*

The Game of the Owl does not seem to have had much influence on other dice games, perhaps because identifying the individual throws on three dice is tedious in play and unattractive graphically. One exception is Mitelli's *Nuovo gioco de li animali*: this is unlike most of his three-dice games, which depend either on the sum of the points thrown or simply on throwing three of a kind. Another is the *Ring Würfel Spiel*[65] by Johann Trautner of Nuremberg, (fig 15) but this just substitutes images of people and animals for the

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[65] After 1746. Reproduced in: Heiner Vogel, *Bilderbogen und Würfelspiele.* Leipzig: Ed. Leipzig, 1981, p. 56. BM 1893,0331.76

conventional iconography found in non-Italian Owl games, an approach foreshadowed in the *Eulen Spiel* by the Heirs of Johann Peter Wolff, though this retains a few of the conventional images (fig 16).[66]

Fig. 17 – Jeu de l'armée française*, reprint by the Imageries réunies de Jarville-Nancy of a game first published in Metz by Delhalt, about 1872 (Author's collection)*

A 19th-century adaptation is the *Jeu de l'armée française,* in which the throw of triple six (take all) is labelled 'Thiers' and that of triple five (take half) 'Mac-Mahon': the game was first published about 1872.[67] The other triplets are not privileged. The game depicts the uniforms and ranks of the French armed forces.

Like its more famous sister, the Game of the Goose, the Game of the Owl demonstrates the effectiveness of the medium of printing in diffusing ideas and images across Europe. And, even more than in the history of *Goose,* the loss of many early examples means that the narrative must be pieced together from what little remains.

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[66] Nuremberg, about 1720. Giochidelloca #1730.
[67] Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877) was the first President (1871-1873) of the Third Republic of France. Patrice de Mac-Mahon succeeded him from 1873 to 1875, then from 1875 to 1879.