

SCHEDE

Schede a cura di: Ilaria Ampollini, Giulia Arrighetti, Miriam Campopiano, Tommaso Cerutti, Salvatore Ciriaco, Filippo Gattai Tacchi, Dario Generali, Tito Menzani, Gian Paolo G. Scharf, Ginevra Villani, Agnese Visconti

Sono segnalati lavori di: F. Barbaro, R. Bizzocchi, N. Di Cosmo – L. Pubblici, G. Iannuzzi, D. Marchesini – S. Pivato, A. Spanos, A. Valoroso e inoltre: *Écrire l'histoire environnementale au XXI^e siècle. Sources, méthodes, pratiques*; *Selve oscure e alberi strani: i boschi nell'Italia di Dante*; *Quando il mondo scalò il Sublime. Scienza e Storia nel primo Memoriale dell'Albergo Nave d'Oro di Predazzo (1820-1875)*; *Esodo e ritorno. I contadini italiani dalla grande trasformazione a oggi*; *I Presidenti della Repubblica e il ruolo internazionale dell'Italia. Dal Trattato di pace al Trattato di Maastricht (1947-1992)*.

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sentò in traduzione tedesca come manuale di comportamento per le donne ariane. La cosa è altamente significativa del mutare dei tempi: un'opinione che nel Rinascimento poté essere considerata progressista, nel novecento finiva invece per incarnare un ideale ultra-conservatore. Al di là dell'attualità o meno del pensiero del Barbaro, insomma, il suo trattato merita di essere letto non solo per un interesse storico-antiquario, o al più linguistico, ma anche perché aiuta a comprendere l'evoluzione del sentimento familiare nei secoli.

Gian Paolo G. Scharf

APOSTOLOS SPANOS, *Games of History. Games and Gaming as Historical Sources*, London/New York, Routledge, 2021, 200 p.

The book *Games of History. Games and Gaming as Historical Sources* by Apostolos Spanos demonstrates how and how much board and card games can be a valuable source for historical studies, providing scholars with several visual, material, and textual information. Spanos's work is part of a wider series of "Guides to Using Historical Sources", edited by Routledge and primarily addressed to students. The series, available in Open Access, also includes a volume devoted to Russian sources, one about sources for the history of emotions and one about sources in regard to the Holocaust. Finding games within the corpus of primary sources to be considered is therefore highly significant.

Some authors have previously dealt with games as historical documents. Let us think, for instance, to the book by A. Girard and C. Quénel that outlines the history of France through different editions and versions of the Game of the Goose (*L'histoire de France contée par le jeu de l'oie*, Paris 1982). This game is also at the centre of the more recent volume by A. Seville (*The cultural legacy of the royal Game of the Goose. 400 years of printed board games*, Amsterdam 2019), who has retraced the "cultural legacy" of one of the most famous and antique board games, on the wake of cultural game studies as founded by J. Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1938). M. Keene focuses on it, too, but in its astronomical variant (*Playing among the stars: Science in Sport, or the Pleasures of Astronomy (1804)*, «History of Education», 40/2011, pp. 521-542); thus, he sheds light on the history of education and the circulation of scientific knowledge. Further games, among which also some card games, have been considered by B. Gribling in her chapter devoted to the teaching and learning of British history (*Playing with the past: child consumers, pedagogy and British history games, c. 1780–1850*, in *Pasts at play. Childhood encounters with history in British culture, 1750–1914*, Manchester 2020, pp. 193-220) and by J. Dove in his essay on geographical board-games in their relation to the history of tourism (*Geographical board game: promoting tourism and travel in Georgian England and Wales*, «Journal of Tourism History», 8/2016, pp. 1-18). The list is not exhaustive, but it is sufficient to make clear that in the last years an increasing number of scholars has relied on board and card games. Their visual and text contents have been in-depth investigated and have enriched the historical reconstructions, which have benefited from an original perspective. Nevertheless, historiography was to date lacking in a book that makes the point on the issue.

Spanos approaches the subject providing first his readers with some insights on possible historical approaches to the study of games (chapters 1 and 2); then, he outlines how different scholarships may benefit of the use of games as primary sources (chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6) and, finally, he gives three examples that concretely show in what terms games can be fruitfully investigated (chapters 7, 8 and 9).

The first chapter delves into the conceptual approach, which, Spanos explains, can both use onomasiology («the study of the different terms available for designating the same or similar thing or concept», p. 23) or semasiology (which «seeks to map all the various meanings a term has in a specific spacetime», p. 24). In this case, some of the working questions

may refer to what «concepts are included in a specific game» (p. 25) or, conversely, to how a specific concept is «visualized in different games played in a specific period» (p. 28). The second chapter is devoted to the material study of games. Material history, needless to say, is as promising as fascinating. Therefore, it has encountered with interest from the majority of scholars in the last decades: the richness of findings and reflections it nurtures, also thanks to the evident interweaving with social and cultural history, is visible to all. Applying the material study to games means to bring out several aspects related to their uses, their circulation, their place in certain ages, contexts, and cultures. Spanos points out that such approach «offers evidence, among other things, on the materials a society had access to and the relevant usage, as well as the society's technological level, divisions between those who could afford the ownership of games and those who could not, and sometimes on social borders and gender-related evidence». Moreover, games' material dimension informs us about «pastimes, aesthetic values and priorities», but also about habits «related to everyday life or special occasions» (p. 32).

The following chapters look more closely at how games can be important sources for different scholarships. Chapter 3 focuses on *Games of Culture*. By recalling, among others, the work *Rules of Play* by K. Salen and E. Zimmerman (Cambridge 2004), Spanos underlines the «importance of games as sources for the cultural study of a given society» (p. 40) and their role as «witnesses of culture» (p. 39). Chapter 4 looks instead at *Games of Society*. It is evident that games and the act of playing tell us a lot about a society, its peculiarities, and its traditions. Moreover, they offer us a precious testimony about social interactions, both within everyday life (p. 63) and special occasions (p. 71), as well as about key historical themes like equalities and inequalities (p. 72), thus becoming a valuable source for gender studies. Chapter 5 is devoted to *Games of Politics*: as Spanos outlines, it focuses on «how to study games that are related, one way or another, to political history» (p. 88). This relation is understood in very different ways: the author considers in fact games as «media of visual political communication», as «witnesses of political history», as «agents and witnesses of low politics» and, finally, with regard to the laws and rules that have been controlling games and their uses in various periods (p. 88). The last thematic chapter, instead, deals with *Games of Metaphysics*, where metaphysics stands for both religious doctrines and supernatural activities, like divination. In this latter meaning, the term «metaphysics» calls into play the very well-known tarots. As Spanos explains, they were not originally conceived as a divination tool, but they were quickly used as such, thus reflecting significant sociocultural instances. As concerns the ties between games and religious doctrines, Spanos explores the «didactic use of games to introduce or promote religious doctrines, rules and principles» and the «religious reactions towards games and gaming».

As this bird's eye overview suggests, Spanos aims to offer a systematic, and as much as possible exhaustive, picture of why and how card and board games can and should be included within the range of historical studies. In doing so, he takes his readers by hand while walking through an impressive amount of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include games coming from different periods, places, cultures, and social contexts, ranging from chess to videogames, from African to European games, passing through Asia and the Americas. Secondary sources make use both of classic authors, like J. Huizinga and R. Caillois, and of more recent ones, like C. A. Kocurek and P. Booth. Such extreme richness, together with the fact that the volume is intended to be a guide, forces Spanos to often recur to recaps, anticipations, and methodological insights. Although necessary, this way of exposing makes reading less enjoyable.

Spanos also draws on frequent classifications, which help his readers sort the many subjects and examples. However, at least some of these classifications are questionable. The most problematic appears in the very first pages of the *Pregame*, where Spanos introduces the categories that he is going to refer to. These categories are, as Spanos himself underlines, «more often than not intersecting». He divides games in «games of competition»,

«games of chance», «board games», «card games», «simulation games», «role-playing games», and «serious games». However, as one may notice, such categories are based on criteria of different nature: board games and card games, for instance, are two categories based on the type of material support, whilst the category of «serious games» concerns the purpose of a game (educational, opposed to ludic). I would not call it, as Spanos does, «permeability» of the categories; on the contrary, it seems to me they just fail to efficiently gather the (numerous) types of games.

A further example comes from Chapter 6. In this chapter about metaphysics, faith and divination are kept together, so that games related to occultism are analysed in the same perspective of those related to religion. Although Spanos' choice of merging these two dimensions within the framework of metaphysics is understandable, it is hard not to think that tarots belong to a very different context from, let us say, board-games used as didactic tools by religious orders. Or again, in Chapter 3, while talking about games and culture, Spanos states that «there are various types of culture: high culture, low culture, learned culture, popular culture, national culture, religious culture, material culture, etc.» (p. 41). Despite we all agree with him about the existence of «various types of culture», it is not obvious to also agree with his sharp distinction between high and low, or learned and popular culture. A guide for students should give readers the opportunity to be aware of that, especially since the author deals with a subject that demonstrates, once again, how much these distinctions need to be discussed and re-discussed.

However, this is just one side of the coin. Overall, the volume is a valuable tool for students and early-career researchers, as well as an excellent starting point to conduct original research. Spanos is certainly not stingy with suggestions and hints for topics that could be investigated. For instance, he imagines next and possible developments of the analysis of the board game «The snake and the ladder»: «(a) The snake and the ladder as religious symbols (b) The collection of vices and virtues included in the game in various period and places. (c) The secularization of the game and its reasons. (d) The replacement of the spiral board with the rectangular and linear one» (p. 119). In the next page, he rather underlines that it would be interesting to study how other religions than Christianity have been reacting to games and gaming.

The last three chapters finally offer some examples of what concretely means to investigate games with the tools borrowed from historical studies. For instance, chapter 8 illustrates what chess may tell us, depending on the approach we use (e.g., political, cultural, social, gender and erotic or religious). In this way, Spanos demonstrates effective applications of the theories and methods he has been explaining to his readers in the course of the volume. This choice proves valuable and makes the volume extremely useful for any students or early-researcher who wants to approach the games through the lenses of history.

Ilaria Ampollini

STÉPHANE FRIOUX, RENAUD BÉCOT (a cura di), **Écrire l'histoire environnementale au XXI^e siècle. Sources, méthodes, pratiques**, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2022, 359 p.

Il volume – nel quale sono state raccolte dal RUCHE (Réseau Universitaire des Chercheurs en Histoire Environnementale) le relazioni presentate al Convegno sulla storia ambientale tenutosi a Lione dal 13 al 15 giugno 2018 con il contributo di varie istituzioni, tra le quali il LARHRA (Laboratoire de Recherche Historique Rhône-Alpes), lo IUF (Institut Universitaire de France) e l'Université Lumière Lyon 2 – è l'esito di uno scambio plurilingue di riflessioni e discussioni collettive svoltesi nel corso di ripetuti incontri, colloqui e confronti tra studiosi di diverse discipline, che rispecchiano il rapido sviluppo che ha carat-