# **Comenius Project 2013-2015**



## "Living Our Common Ancestry"

#### The Art School of Gerakas, Attiki, Greece

### **BYZANTINE GAMES**

## January 2015

Games have always played a significant role in the Greek society, since the ancient times. They have been the way to make children face and handle a lot of difficulties as well as to entertain themselves creatively. Through games children discover themselves and the world around them. Games help children comprehend their surroundings and give them the opportunity to learn and to develop new skills.

#### Through games a child can learn:

- to solve problems
- to use reasoning
- to interact with others and participate in group activities
- to adopt socially acceptable behaviour
- to develop their creativity
- to adapt to new situations

We now know that games were not as important in Byzantium as in Ancient Greece; still the Byzantines, out of habit but also for entertainment and in order to keep the tradition alive, played games as children and also learnt through educational games. There have been studies concerning the role of games in the Byzantine life which show that from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards games were used as a way to mould human characters.

# Rattle

A rattle is a typical children's toy. It is an ancient percussion instrument, made of wood, metal, clay or a combination of these materials, which produces a varied, high-pitched and indistinct sound. It usually had a handle and a horseshoe frame which bore either moving parallel bars (hitting its inner sides), or steady bars bearing moving, sound-producing objects with a hole in the middle.







#### **Knuckle - bones**

This was a game played by children but also by adults, the difference being in the prize for the winner. The knuckle bones used were taken from cattle and the players moved them on a surface or threw them as dice.





#### Ноор

A hoop was a structure for children who tried to roll a wooden or metal wheel using their hands or a stick. The child that arrived first at the finish line was the winner.





#### Tug of war

Tug of war is a game still played in our days. The players first draw a dividing line on the ground. Then, the two teams of players, each holding one of the ends of a rope, try to pull hard so as to make the rival team step over the dividing line. This is obviously a team game aiming to develop a spirit of noble emulation and keen competition.





#### **Still Figurines**

# This game is the ancestor of the contemporary game bearing the same name.





#### **Thieves and Police**

In this game, which is still popular, there are two teams. Each team chases the members of the rival team and tries to "arrest" them when they are not in the safety of their "home", which is actually their refuge and offers them protection.





#### Blind man's buff

This game is also played in our days. There must be at least 3 players. One of them is blindfolded and tries to touch the other players and find who they are.





#### **Prisoner's base**

Another team game. Each team decides on a tree or a column as its base. The purpose is for the base to be protected by the members of the team. The children have to decide or to cast lots, as to the team that will start first. One of the players of the team then stands in the area between the two bases (this is usually one of the weakest players in the beginning) and at the same time another player comes from the rival team.

The two players meet and try to touch each other. The player who manages to touch the other one first, captures the opponent and leads them to the base. The second round starts with a player of the second team. In the same way the rounds continue until the last player. This last player has to try to defend the base. No more than two players from the rival team can attack at the same time. The player can attempt to free other team members, so as to be assisted, by touching them.

Then these players call out: "I'm coming out, without telling anyone!"



# Whirligig, humming top, spin, cone, rhombus

These are all names for the same toy. Children played with it in teams. They used a cone-shaped object which was twisted around its axis after it had been set in motion by a player who pulled a string attached to it as if on a reel.







Another game for children, jacks, was played by tossing pebbles or small stones high up in the air and trying to catch them again. In the Byzantine period this game was played by little children, mainly girls, and was called "pebbles".

### Toys

Boys usually played in big yards and other outdoor areas. They used clay horses and carts. Evidence indicates that there were craftsmen who constructed clay figurines of animals for children to play with.



Girls used to stay home and they played with wax, clay or plaster dolls.



# Bibliography

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