

Small Categories Series

Dice!

Dice have been used since before recorded history, and it's uncertain where they originated. The oldest known dice were excavated as part of a 5000-year-old backgammon set at the Burnt City, an archeological site in south-eastern Iran. Other excavations from ancient tombs in the Indus Valley civilization indicate a South Asian origin. Dicing is mentioned as an Indian game in the *Rigveda*, *Atharvaveda* and Buddha games list. It also plays a critical role in the great Hindu epic *Mahabharata*, where Yudhisthira plays a game of dice against the Kauravas for the northern kingdom of Hastinapura. There are several biblical references to "casting lots", as in Psalm 22, indicating that dicing (or a related activity) was commonplace when the psalm was composed. Knucklebones was a skill game played by women and children; a derivative form had the four sides of the bone receive different values and count as modern dice. Gambling with two or three dice was a very popular form of amusement in Greece, especially with the upper classes.

Dice were originally made from the talus of hooved animals, colloquially known as "knucklebones," leading to the nickname "bones" for dice. Modern Mongolians still use such bones as shagai for games and fortunetelling. Ivory, wood and plastics such as cellulose acetate have also been used. Dice are hard to distinguish from knucklebones in literature because ancient writers confused the two, but both were used in prehistoric times.

Seven- and eight-sided dice are described in the 13th century *Libro de los juegos* as having been invented by Alfonso X in order to speed up play in chess variants. Around the end of the 1960s, non-cubical dice became popular among players of wargames, and since have been employed extensively in role-playing games and trading card games. [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dice>]

