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Ludus (ancient Rome)



Roman girl at play (ludus) with knucklebones



Gaming table for *ludus duodecim scriptorum*

In ancient Roman culture, the Latin word ***ludus*** (plural *ludi*) has several meanings within the semantic field of "play, game, sport, training" (see also ludic).^[1]

An elementary or primary school or the school of the "litterator" attended by boys and girls up to the age of 11 was a *ludus*. *Ludi* were to be found throughout the city, and were run by a *ludi magister*

(schoolmaster) who was often an educated slave or freedman. School started around six o'clock each morning and finished just after midday. Students were taught math, reading, writing, poetry, geometry and sometimes rhetoric.

The word *ludus* also referred to a training school for gladiators; see Gladiator: Schools and training. Examples include the Ludus Magnus and Ludus Dacicus.

Ludus was also the word for a board game, examples of which include *ludus latruncularum* and *ludus duodecim*

scriptorum, or a game played with knucklebones (*astragali*).

Latin poetry often explores the concept of *ludus* as playfulness, both in the writing of poetry as a kind of play and as a field for erotic role-playing.^[2] "Poetic play (*ludus, ludere, iocum, etc.*)," Michèle Lowrie observes, "denotes two related things: stylistic elegance of the Alexandrian variety and erotic poetry."^[3]

Ludi, always plural, were the games held in conjunction with Roman religious festivals.

See also

- Lusus Troiae, the Troy Game

References

1. *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982, 1985 reprint), pp. 1048–1049.
2. Thomas N. Habinek, *The World of Roman Song: From Ritualized Speech to Social Order* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp. 5, 143, et passim.
3. Michèle Lowrie, *Horace's Narrative Odes* (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 41.

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