

Geographic Board Games

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Abstract

Geographic Board Games feature maps. As board games developed during the Early Modern Period, 1450 to 1750/1850, the maps that were utilised reflected the contemporary knowledge of the Earth and the cartography and surveying technologies at their time of manufacture and sale. As ephemera of family life, many board games have not survived, but those that do reveal an entertaining way of learning about the geography, exploration and politics of the world. This paper provides an introduction to four Early Modern Period geographical board games and analyses how changes through time reflect the ebb and flow of national and imperial ambitions. The portrayal of Australia in three of the games is examined.

Keywords: maps, board games, Early Modern Period, Australia

Introduction

In this selection of geographic board games, maps are paramount. The games themselves tend to feature a throw of the dice and moves on a set path. Obstacles and hazards often affect how quickly a player gets to the finish and in a competitive situation whether one wins, or not. The board games examined in this paper were made and played in the Early Modern Period which according to Stearns (2012) dates from 1450 to 1750/1850¹. In this period printing gradually improved and books and journals became more available, at least to the well-off. Science developed using experimental techniques and real world observation; relying less on classical authority. Cartography developed and maps using Mercator's projection were a boon to navigators. Surveying improved. Longitude could be found using portable chronometers. Guns and ships of more formidable design were developed and trade and colonial rivalries began to determine the trajectory of nations.

The first national survey of a country was conducted in France by the Cassini family between 1750 and 1815. The trigonometric survey produced an accurate national map (Rumsay 2009). Britain began its national survey by mapping the Highlands of Scotland to assist in the suppression of the Highland clans after the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745-1746. William Roy was commissioned to create these maps. '... the Roy map can be seen to reflect growing Enlightenment aspirations for greater geometrical accuracy and standardisation, as well as a desire to discover empirical truth, and to control and order geographical space through reconnaissance and survey' (National Library Scotland n.d.). William Roy measured the first baseline for the Trigonometrical Survey of Great Britain in 1791. In 1801 this organisation became the Ordnance Survey.

Maps are also propaganda, displaying the ebb and flow of empire to one's own citizens and to rival nation states. It was at once a means of declaring tenancy, and of projecting power. Geographical Board games performed their role, teaching families and their children the names of places in the news. Australia and other parts of the world revealed their true size and shape to families and individuals who played these games. In this paper these changes are described and analysed for the four geographical board games featured.

¹ The timing of shifts in power, resulting from changes in trade and technology, varied by country and area of the world (ibid).

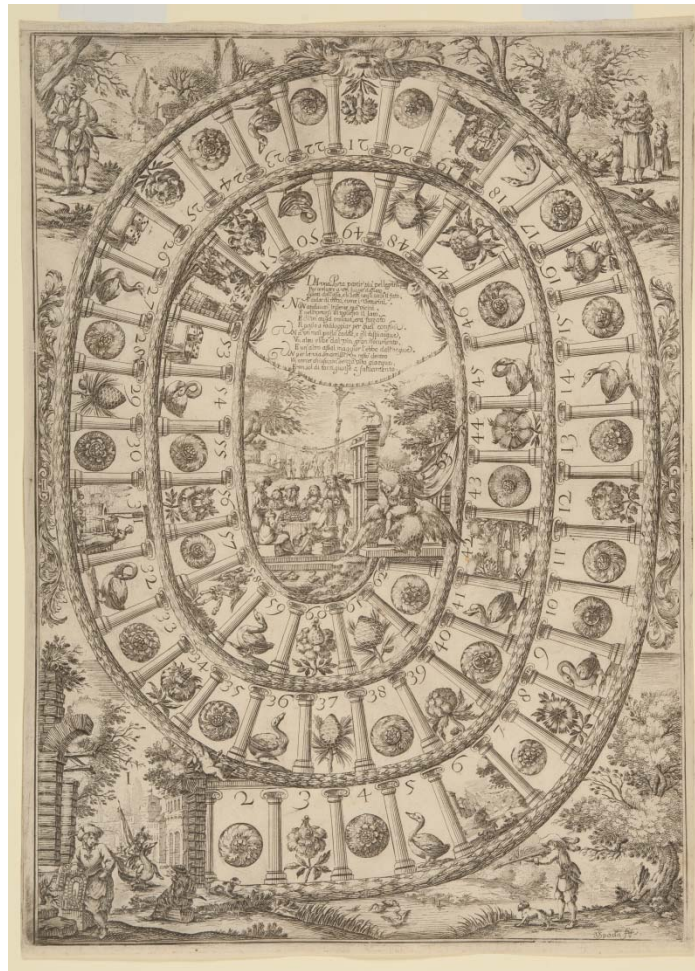


Figure 1: The *Goose Game*, c. 1650 attributed to Valerio Spada (1613-1688). Etching and engraving. Image with the permission of Waddeston Manor, National Trust. Image © Waddesdon Manor, The Rothschild Collection (Rothschild Family Trust). Photo: Mike Fear.

Seville (2008) citing Carrera (1617) relates that Francesco de' Medici (1574-1587) sent a board game *Jeu de l'Oie* or *Game of the Goose* as a present to King Philip II of Spain. The numbered squares had cabalistic significance. Seville (2008) citing Sir Thomas Browne (1615) informs us that the final square is number 63 which is the 'Grande Climacteric', sixty three, the most dangerous age of man. At the beginning of the Early Modern Period board games were designed with classical motifs rediscovered in the Renaissance. This presumably assisted sales to owners who wished to display their erudition and modernity.

The *Goose Game* (Figure 1) was a gambling game and used 2 dice to determine the movement distance. A player landing on a goose square received a bonus move of the same distance again. Landing on a skull, or skeleton square, in some versions of the game, sent the player back to the beginning (Alvarinõ XM n.d.). It is a game still widely played especially on continental Europe and in Quebec (R. Jacobs pers comm., 2012). At the centre a family can be seen playing the game and at bottom left a man is selling the game. Jacobs (2012 p.4) writes the spiral form of these *Le Jeu de l'Oie* games was believed by the early French publishers to have been ancient Greek in origin. This added prestige to the product, grounding it in the Renaissance re-discovery of classical civilisation.

Games featuring Australia or Terra Australis

These games require the use of dice or teetotum: a kind of spinning top that falling on its side displays the number of moves the player must take. In these games the player advances along a single track. This can be a unicursal or one tracked game much like a labyrinth (Aarseth 1997 p.4) that takes you to the centre and you must escape back out the same way. Multicursal is maze-like with the track dividing and rejoining and some decision making skill is required to complete the game in the fastest way.

Except for the first game, these games are map based and feature Australia or Terra Australis. They show an interest in the exotic and distant.

La Jeu de Monde

Pierre Duval's 1645 game *La Jeu de Monde* is displayed in Figure 2a. It is an educational variation of the *Game of the Goose* and believed to be one of the oldest games featuring maps. Players rolled dice and went from the polar regions in circle one, to French New Canada or Canada Nouvelle in circle two, then British Virginia in circle three and thence to France in circle 63 at the centre. In circle 5 California is mapped as an island. Australia does not feature. However the inset map (Figure 5b) displays the outline of Terra Australis Incognita.

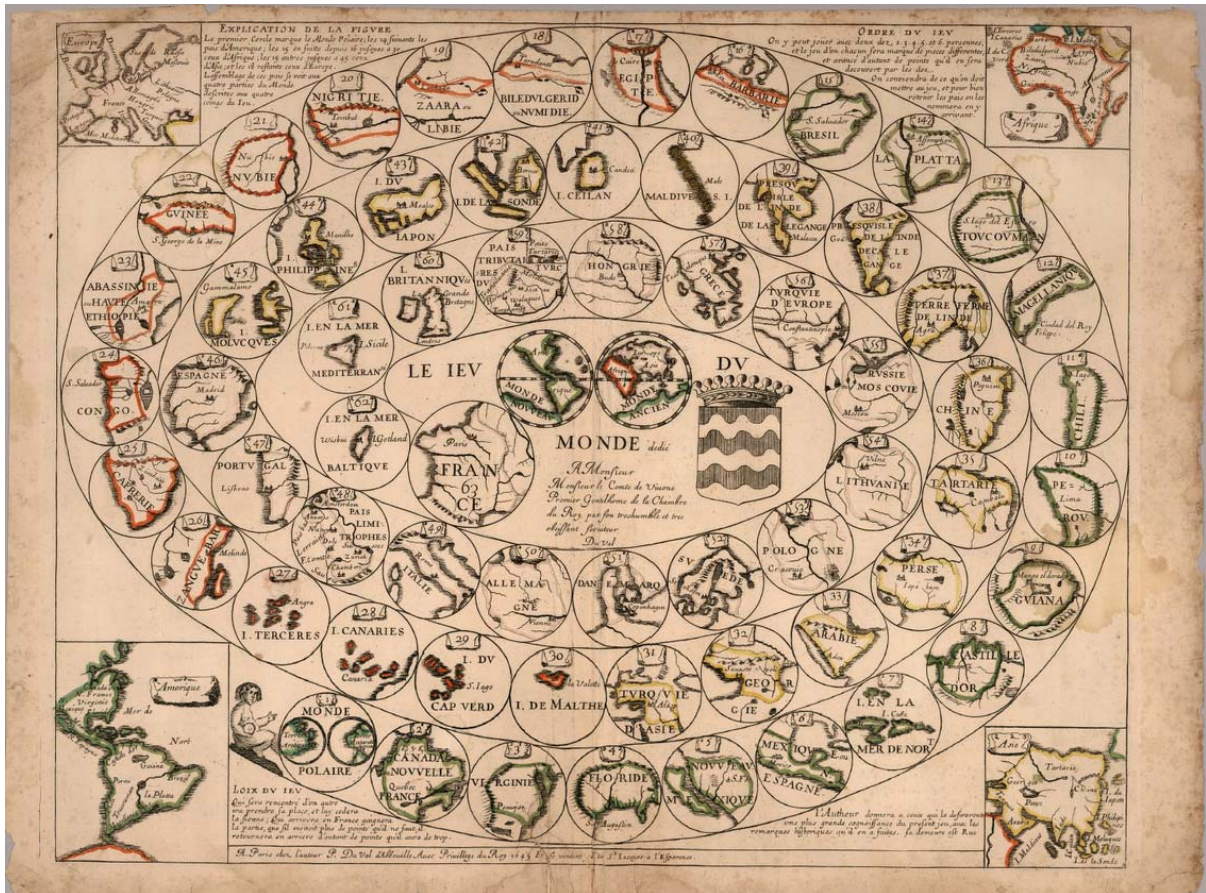


Figure 2a: *Le Jeu du Monde*, Pierre Duval, 1645. Image used with David Rumsey's permission. (Source: <http://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/s/yff293>)

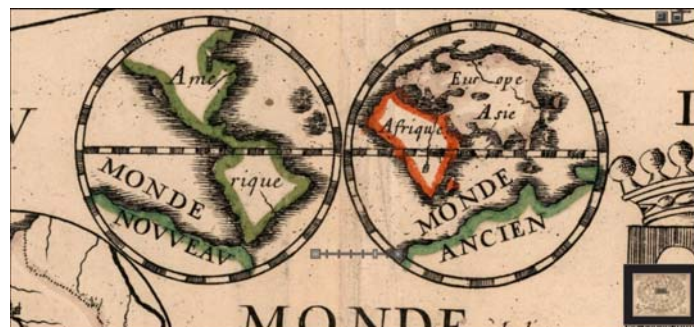


Figure 2b: Detail of world map at centre of *Le Jeu du Monde*. Image used with David Rumsey's permission.

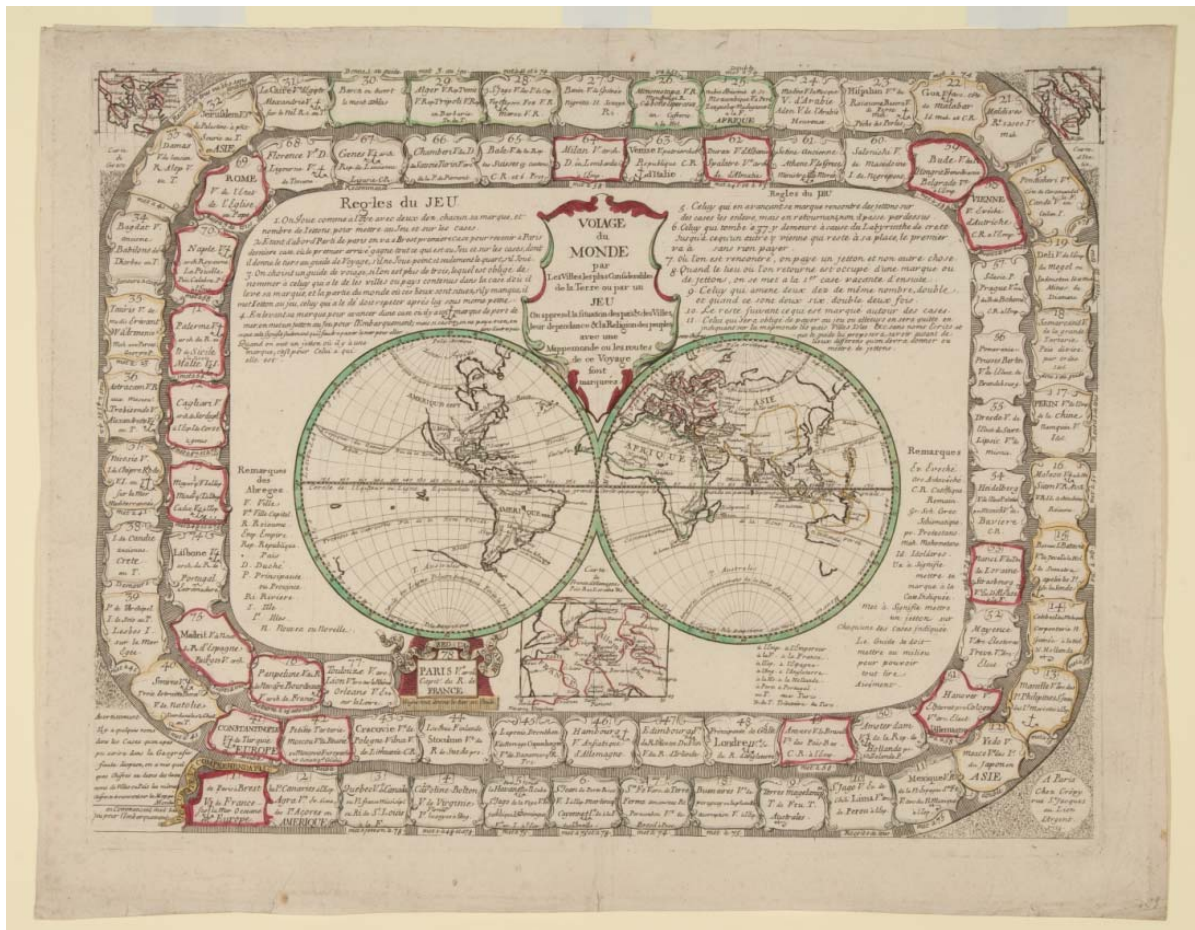


Figure 3a: *Le Jeu du Monde* published 1718 by Chez Crepy, Paris. Image with the permission of Waddeston Manor, National Trust. Image © Waddeston Manor, The Rothschild Collection (Rothschild Family Trust).

Le Jeu du Monde, in Figure 3a, published by Chez Crepy in 1718 uses the spiral design of the *Game of the Goose* to display the names of places that are visited on the world tour game. The map is in a Globular projection (Savard 2012). N. Guinee, Carpentarie and Nouvelle Hollande are drawn as a contiguous piece of land. Paris is 20° East of the Ferro Meridien established by Louis XIII and Cardinal Richalieu in 1634 (Wikipedia, 2014). Part of the west coast of South Island New Zealand is shown. California still appears as an island. The southern portion of Tasmania is mapped. The map has used information from Tasman's voyages as shown in Figure 3b. Australia features in the game. After visiting Manilla in the Philippines at location 13 the player visits the Celebes, Carpentaria, New Guinea and New Holland at location 14. This is followed by Batavia, Borneo, Java and Sumatra at location 15. This follows the yellow line in the game that passes through Australia. Antarctica is mapped inaccurately near Tierra del Fuego.



Figure 3b: Abel Tasman's map of the Australian, New Guinea and New Zealand areas. Authors: Wed. Gerard Hulst van Keulen (publisher), Jacob Swart (publisher) New Guinee, Carpentaria, New Holland and Van Diemen's Land. Image in the public domain. (Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AMH-5546-NA_Map_showing_the_journeys_of_Abel_Tasman.jpg)

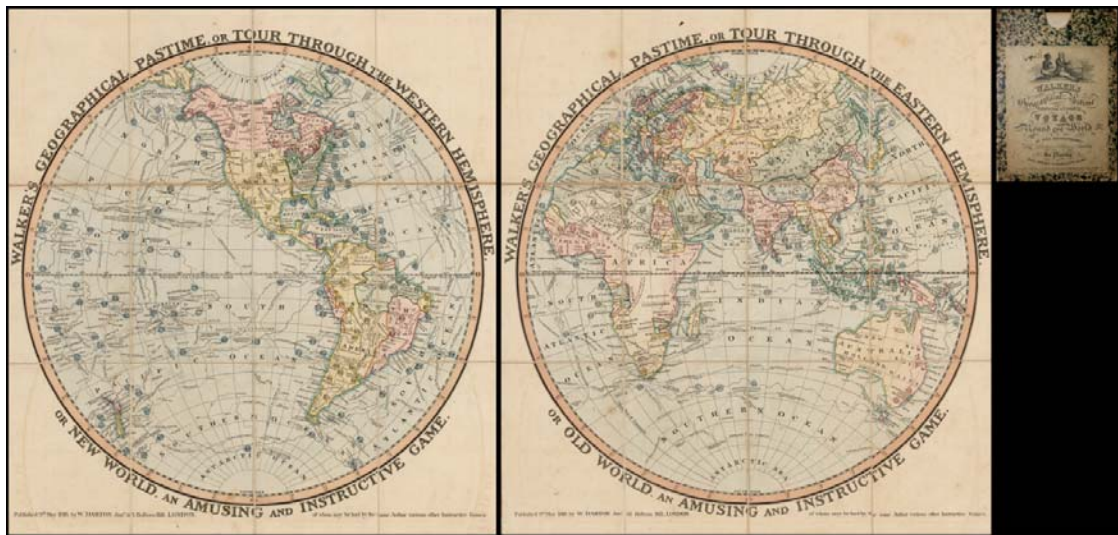


Figure 5a: *Walker's Geographical Pastime Exhibiting a Complete Voyage Round the World in Two Hemispheres with Tetotum, Pillars & Counters, for Playing This Highly Interesting Game.* William Darton 1816, London. Permission granted to use image by Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc. (Source: http://www.raremaps.com/gallery/detail/32235/Walkers_Geographical_Pastime_Exhibiting_a_Complete_Voyage_Round_the_World/Darton.html)

Figure 5a and 5b display Walker's 1816 game map drawn by William Darton. The game was provided with two booklets. Port Jackson stop 82 and Botany Bay stop 83 are located a long way apart. Sydney has not yet become the standard name for the penal colony. Western Port, discovered by George Bass in 1798 is marked but not Port Phillip Bay which was discovered on 5 January 1802 by John Murray sailing on the *Lady Nelson*. Matthew Flinders commenced mapping Port Phillip Bay ten weeks later (*Lady Nelson Tasmania 2011*). Western Australia is termed New Holland and retains the Dutch names for regional areas. Eastern Australia is called New South Wales. Stop 81 is on the Tropic of Capricorn. Tasmania, called Van Diemen's Land is shown separate from the Australian mainland. It was not called Tasmania until 1 January 1856 when it became self-governing (Alexander 2005). A line marking Captain Cook's voyage passes to the south of Tasmania. Other explorer's routes are marked. The United States had purchased Louisiana from the French in 1803 but this change has not been made to the map. Florida is still Spanish.



Figure 5b: Detailed view of the Australian area of *Walker's Geographical Pastime or Tour through the Eastern Hemisphere or Old World. An Amusing and Instructive Game.* *Walker's Geographical Pastime or Tour through the Western Hemisphere or New World. An Amusing and Instructive Game.* William Darton 1816, London.

Discussion and conclusion

The development of trade and imperial expansion, in particular of European powers, depended on technical innovations in transport and navigation. Cartographies of water and land became not only the means of travelling to new lands but the legal basis of possession, settlement and taxation. Printing companies that were already making

maps developed a sideline in board games featuring the information they already possessed. Pierre Duval's 1645 game *La Jeu de Monde* was an innovation that probably featured maps his company already printed and sold.

In this brief survey of four geographical board games we have seen Australia featured, though as merely a phantom Terra Incognita in the 1645 *Le Jeu du Monde* of Pierre Duval. In *Le Jeu du Monde* published 1718 by Chez Crepy the first enthralling outline of Australia and Van Dieman's Land appears with the reasonable but incorrect guess of the time that Carpentaria is linked to New Guinea. In Wallis' *Complete Voyage Round the World, A New Geographical Pastime*, published in 1796 the inhabited areas of the earth are nearly all mapped, at least in outline. The French revolution is underway. The United States has fifteen states and Canada is British. Louisiana is still French. There is a moral aspect to the game. The note for location 22 in Senegal says the player shall lament the slave trade there and miss a turn. *Walker's Geographical Pastime Exhibiting a Complete Voyage Round the World* 1816 game looks slick and modern. The handmade look is disappearing.

Geographical Board Games reveal the contemporary interest that people had in the geography of their changing world. The fortunes of France varied with the movement of the Prime Meridian. At first 20° to the east of the Ferro Meridian, then on the Paris Meridian at 0°, and later 2.3508° E of London. The Eastern and Western Hemispheres were no longer divided naturally to the west of Africa on the Ferro Meridian. Power was moving to London and geographical board games became the provenance of the British in the Nineteenth Century as its empire grew.

These board games are an interesting cartographic resource, with many fine examples preserved in museums. Being the ephemera of family life, much has disappeared. Those that remain are well worth a look to see how families learned about explorers' discoveries and in the process had fun and learnt a little of how the world is mapped and understood. The games are a small act of discovery themselves, the players sharing vicariously the joys and miseries of real explorers.

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