

theses, although they show different scope and ambition. Fash's succeeds better as a book for lay readers; Schele and Freidel's presents provocative conclusions of greater interest to scholars. What remains is, for Fash, a more complete scholarly publication of his finds—a pressing task as data mount from his continuing excavations—and, for Schele and Freidel, a winnowing of the more imaginative ideas from the solid.

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Uses of Sport

The Mesoamerican Ballgame. VERNON L. SCARBOROUGH and DAVID R. WILCOX, Eds. University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 1991. xvii, 404 pp., illus. \$45.

Few aspects of ancient Mesoamerican culture have generated as much interest among both specialists and the general public as the game that was played with rubber balls on masonry courts. According to Paul Kirchhoff, the ball game constitutes a defining trait of the Mesoamerican region. In the archeological record, ball courts, stone paraphernalia, and scenes in art all testify to the importance of the game. Early colonial texts also underline the importance of this sport. According to accounts pertaining to the Aztec and West Mexican Acaxee, the ball court was the first structure fashioned in a community. The ball game plays a prominent role in the mythology of the Aztec, Tarascans, and Maya. Far more than simply entertaining sport, the game was inextricably tied to native society, ritual, and belief.

During the past century aspects of the ball game have been intensively studied by many scholars, among them Eduard Seler, Walter Krickeberg, Theodore Stern, Gordon Ekholm, Stephan Borhegyi, and Ted Leyenaar. Derived from a conference held in Tucson in 1985, the 16 studies contained in this most recent work on the subject not only review and assess earlier work but also provide new interpretative insights and previously unreported field data. Geographically, the coverage is broad. Fourteen of the studies concern specific regions, among them the Gulf Coast, Central Mexico, Oaxaca, West Mexico, the Maya lowlands and highlands, and the southern piedmont of Chiapas and Guatemala. In addition, Wilcox describes Hohokam ball courts of the American Southwest and rightly notes that they are but northern manifestations of the Mesoamerican ball game.

This volume demonstrates the efficacy of

studying such a phenomenon in the context of the Mesoamerican interaction sphere. Despite its many permutations over time and distance, the Mesoamerican ball game is notably consistent in form, function, and symbolic meaning. Along with delineating enduring essential qualities, such a broad comparative approach can also call attention to markedly divergent forms. Regrettably, there is virtually no attempt in the volume to synthesize and discuss the implications of the papers it includes.

The essays display a wide range of interpretations of the roles and functions of the ball game. According to Wilkerson, Schele and Freidel, and Parsons, the game functioned primarily as a ritual means to communicate with the gods. Other contributors adopt a more functionalist approach and argue that it enhanced social and economic organization. Weigand suggests that, for highland Jalisco, the game served a politically central-

essay focusing upon the distribution of ball courts in Central Mexico, Santley, Berman, and Alexander suggest that the game was an elite means to acquire wealth and territory through high-stake betting. Although this is an intriguing idea that merits comparisons with the intense betting associated with the more humble *patolli*, the ball game was probably not an important means of economic betterment. As Scarborough notes in his essay, the high stakes associated with the game may reflect status rivalry more than immediate economic gain.

Many authors note the close relation of the ball game to warfare. According to Taladoire and Colsenet, the Classic Maya of the Usumacinta regarded the game as "a substitute and symbol for war." The contact-period Acaxee identification of the ball game with war cited by Kelley is probably of considerable antiquity in West Mexico, as Weigand notes a subtle gradation between ball-player and warrior figurines in Proto-classic Jalisco. Kowalewski, Feinman, Finsten, and Blanton mention that in the Valley of Oaxaca courts first appear in frontier areas of conflict, and suggest that a function of the ball game may have been to keep militia fit and ready for combat. Following the 1949 work of Stern, some authors argue that the game was a substitute for military conflict. However, the game would best be considered as an expression rather than a resolution of conflict. Although it is tempting to view it in a strictly functionalist sense as a means of integrating and stabilizing competing social groups, it can also be considered as but another manifestation of conflict and aggression. Classic Maya texts provide compelling evidence that individuals sacrificed in ball games were often captives taken in war.

The Mesoamerican Ballgame is a balanced synthesis of archeological field research and iconographic interpretation. Detailed information on actual ball courts and their distribution is provided for the Tehuacán Valley, the Valley of Oaxaca, West Mexico, the American Southwest, southern Chiapas, and the Quichean region of highland Guatemala. The discussion of excavations at the Uxmal ball court by Kurjack, Maldonado, and Robertson is especially important for determining the chronological relationship between this Puuc site and the Toltec period, or Modified Florescent, of Chichén Itzá. It is unfortunate that two of the illustrations of this study (figures 8.1 and 8.3) are transposed, since this could confuse the distinctions between Toltec and Maya that the authors so carefully point out.

Among the studies focusing upon iconographic interpretation, Wilkerson examines the role of the ball game in northern Veracruz and provides a detailed interpretation of the six reliefs upon the South Ball



Drawing of ball-court sculptural panel from Aparicio, Veracruz, suggesting sacrificial death by decapitation. [From P. C. Weigand's chapter in *The Mesoamerican Ballgame*]

izing function by formalizing internal social opposition in public ritual. In a like manner, Fox states that the Quiché ball game united competing factions within the community. Two other studies stress economic functions. According to Wilcox, the Hohokam ball game was an integral part of a regional ceremonial exchange system that regulated the flow of exotic valuables and other goods. In an

Court at El Tajín. Although maguey-covered mountains are explicitly shown in the two middle panels from the South Ball Court, I am not convinced of Wilkerson's view that pulque is a major subject in these scenes. Independent studies by Jean-Claude Delhalle and Albert Lukx and myself suggest that these middle scenes portray an early version of the Aztec myth describing the creation of people from the remains of the fish-men stolen from the underworld. Rather than great vats of pulque, as Wilkerson suggests, the pools in these scenes probably constitute watery entrances to the underworld. In their study of Maya ball courts, Schele and Freidel provide epigraphic and iconographic evidence that the courts were considered cave-like entrances to the watery underworld. Their essay contains a number of vivid and probably correct perceptions of the Maya ball court. Thus they suggest that the court was considered much like a cleft fertile mountain and note that the three famous ball-court markers from Copán are actually cave-like windows providing views into the underworld. Cohodas also describes the symbolism of the Classic Maya ball game; however, I find much of his argument tenuous and unconvincing. Although Cohodas argues that two major Maya deities known as God L and God N both represent the rubber ball and the setting sun, the corroborating evidence is wanting.

The most intriguing and far-reaching iconographic argument is that presented by Gillespie. Adopting a structuralist approach, she argues that a major ceremonial theme of the ball game was not simply human decapitation but dismemberment, a ritual act that she compares to creation and the delineation of time and the seasons. Gillespie further notes that the identification of decapitation and dismemberment with the ball game is not limited to Mesoamerica but appears in the "rolling head" motif found in native mythology from Alaska to Chile. The striking similarities found in these accounts suggest that many symbolic aspects of the Mesoamerican ball game are extremely ancient and may well antedate the development of complex Mesoamerican civilization.

This collection of essays emphasizes geographical rather than temporal context. Although Susanna Ekholm and others note the presence of ball-player figurines among the Olmec, there is no detailed discussion of the ball game in Early and Middle Formative Mesoamerica. This is unfortunate, since this body of material is of crucial relevance for understanding the origins of later ball-game themes. For example, Tenochtitlán Monument 1 of San Lorenzo, widely cited as a mythical scene of jaguar and human copulation, actually depicts a belted ballplayer atop

a bound captive. In other words, the identification of captive sacrifice with the ball game was probably present among the Early Formative Olmec. Furthermore, does the appearance of ball-game figures at San Lorenzo, Tlatilco, Las Bocas, El Opeño, and other Early Formative sites indicate the first occurrence of the ball game, or does this game have its roots in the earlier Archaic period? The Archaic structure excavated at Gheo Shih, dating to approximately the 5th millennium B.C., is probably a simple open-ended ball court, much like examples illustrated in the essay by Kelley. It is interesting that this feature has often been cited as a "dance plaza," an interpretation that has also been given to the obvious ball courts of the Hohokam.

Aside from the Archaic and Early Formative origins of the ball game, other worthy topics unexplored in this volume are the ball game in the southeastern border of Mesoamerica, Aztec accounts of the game, and representations of the ball game in the Mixtec and Borgia groups of codices. I mention this only to indicate the complexity and richness of this topic. Rather than being the last word on the ball game, this volume constitutes an important addition to a long list of works, many yet to come.

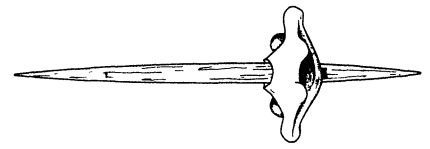
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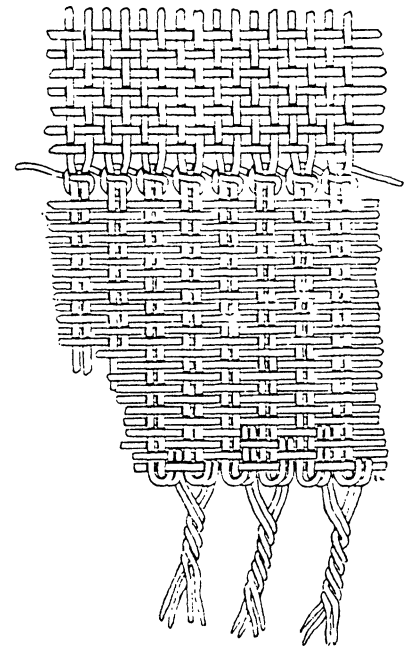
A Craft in Antiquity

Prehistoric Textiles. The Development of Cloth in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages, with Special Reference to the Aegean. E. J. W. BARBER. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1991. xxxii, 471 pp., illus. \$69.50.

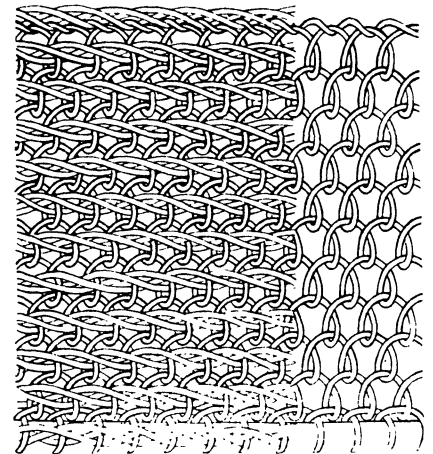
It is ironic that in a discipline concerned with analyzing material remains to resurrect the daily fabric of the past one item that is usually overlooked is fabric in the more tangible sense of the term, that is, textiles. Rare in occurrence and usually grungy when found, textiles have been a poor cousin within archeology, meriting a brief mention and then obscurity at the back of an excavation report. *Prehistoric Textiles* should change all that and catapult textiles and their accompanying spindles, spindle whorls, and loom weights to the same prominence enjoyed by ceramics and epigraphic material. Packed full of useful and intriguing information like the probable Paleolithic (Old Stone Age) origins of spinning and the facts that thread-making preceded basketry and that felt was a relatively



Wooden spindle and clay whorl manufactured during the Late Neolithic of Switzerland. "North of the Mediterranean, representations of spinning are so rare before the Iron Age that we are exclusively dependent on evidence from the spindles themselves." [From *Prehistoric Textiles*; after Staub, 1864]



"Diagram of the closing border of linen Cloth 5, from Schaffis, Switzerland. The warp ends of the main cloth [upper portion] have been used in pairs as weft for a band-warp set up at right angles to the original warp; ca. 3000 B.C." [From *Prehistoric Textiles*; E. Vogt, 1937]



"Diagram of netted 'embroidery' built out from the edge of a woman's woolen blouse from Skrydstrup, Denmark; late 2nd millennium B.C." [From *Prehistoric Textiles*; Broholm and Hald, 1939]