



BEQUEST
NFT PARTNERS

Mesoamerican Collection

Digital Scan of Physical Portfolio



El Juego de Pelota

Topic: The Ballgame

Description:

The Mesoamerican ballgame tradition was a sport with important ritual associations played during the pre-Columbian era since at least 1650 BC by all major civilizations of ancient Mesoamerica, which included well-known cultures such as the Olmec, Maya, Aztec and Mixtec.

Exact rules of the game are unknown, and styles of play evolved across the various cultures and different periods with many ballgame versions, but they shared certain aspects, particularly their settings and symbolic functions. In the most common theory, the aim was to keep the ball in play and get it through

one of the rings, and players struck the ball with their hips, although alternative versions allowed the use of forearms, rackets, bats, or handstones. The ball was made of solid rubber, measuring from 8 to 30 cm and weighing as much as 4 kg (9 lbs), which would make it a lethal weapon in itself that could easily break bones. Teams were composed of male-only players, although the game may have also been played casually for recreation by children and women. The impressive stone ballcourts became a feature of many cities, with over 1500 discovered.

Historical information about the game comes from surviving ballcourts, ballgame artifacts and paraphernalia, and ballgame-related imagery and texts. Players were frequently depicted in Mesoamerican art, appearing in sculptures, ceramics and architectural decoration, the latter often decorating the courts themselves.

Major ballgames were held as formal ritual events. More than just a game, it had religious significance featured in episodes of mythology. Some Mesoamerican cultures often combined competitions with religious human sacrifice, where it became literally a game of life or death. Typically, the captain of the losing team, or even sometimes the entire team, were sacrificed to the gods. Such scenes are depicted in the decorative sculptures on the courts themselves.

In this depiction, representing the Totonac culture during sunset in the Tajín with a panoramic view of the city at the center of Veracruz, the player is offered to the Gods, having consumed hallucinogenic mushrooms called "derrumbes", he has his jugular vein cut, while on the left, Mictlantecuhtli absorbs the last halo of life from the captain of the losing team. Dancers and musicians celebrate on the court with a ritual in the presence of the eagle, solar representative, and the judge, dressed in a rabbit mask symbolizing the Moon, wearing his yoke with a palm for a tail and a head in the shape of a votive axe, which adorns the greenstone piece. The whole landscape presents a city in which the pyramids as well as its niches and the market are perfectly recognizable within Mesoamerican context.
