



Ball player figure

Date

ca. AD 250-550

Medium

Ceramic

Description

Huastec standing ball player wearing star-shaped earrings, necklace, and loincloth, with hair coiled high on top of head. Remains of white and black paint decoration. Right arm and left foot broken and reattached, otherwise in good condition. _____ The ball game was extremely important throughout Mesoamerica. Successful ball players won great acclaim, while the defeated faced severe punishment and even death. This figure may have been made to represent an especially skilled athlete, to commemorate a special victory, or to serve as a good luck talisman. Stone yokes similar to the one worn around the waist by this ballplayer figure have also been found, but it is not certain that players would have worn heavy stone yokes or protective gear made of something lighter and

more flexible. The tall hairstyle is typical of these slender, graceful Huastec figures. **Figurine Function** The original function of archaeological figurines found in museum collections is uncertain. When objects are excavated by archaeologists, then information about the associations between artifacts and the circumstances of their burial are carefully recorded, and we can draw many conclusions about object function. Very few of the archaeological objects found in museums today were excavated in a careful, scientific manner, so we have fewer clues about their past associations and function. A wide range of people and objects are shown in pre-Columbian pottery vessels. From burials, we know that the variety of head shapes, jewelry, and clothing styles reflect the actual appearance of many of these prehistoric people. Variations in human head shapes may be produced as the result of intentional cranial deformation; head shapes were an obvious (and permanent) way to mark one's group affiliation. In a time and place where television and newspapers were unknown, highly decorated pottery was used as one vehicle of information exchange, simultaneously conveying what was socially acceptable by documenting different aspects of real life (models OF society), and what people were expected to do (models FOR behaviors, actions, or appearance). Because figurines represent many life stages and ordinary human activities, they probably served to exemplify the usual norms of behavior, to serve as guidelines or rules to help socialize people and integrate them into society. Although obviously decorative, figurines could also have been

used to make offerings to supernatural powers, to serve as good luck charms, or to accompany the dead as grave goods. The Huastec culture was centered in northern Veracruz, along the Gulf coast area of what is now Mexico. The Huastecs flourished during the Early Postclassic Period, succeeding the earlier Maya and preceding the later Aztecs. The Huastecs are noted for constructing round buildings dedicated to the god Quetzalcoatl. There are about 80,000 modern descendants of the pre-Colombian Huastecs, who live today in Mexico in Veracruz and in San Luis Potosí, concentrated along the route of the Pánuco River. This figure is similar to ballplayer figures in plates 325 and 326, page 225, in *Precolumbian Art of Mexico and Central America*, by Hasso Von Winning. It is also similar to figures on page 78 in *Rediscovered Masterpieces of Mesoamerica* (1985), by Gerald Berjonneau and Jean-Louis Sonnery, Editions Arts: Boulogne. Similar to 97.017.001.

Dimensions

11 5/8 x 4 x 2 1/2 inches (29.5 x 10.2 x 6.4 cm)