

Abstract:

**The archaeology of play: Unearthing the role of games in ancient community**

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Leisure has always been an important aspect of sedentary human life, and it manifested through various forms of recreational pursuits throughout ancient times. While their primary purpose was possibly entertainment, games also became an avenue to hone one's skill and showcase their proficiencies. The spatio-temporal distribution of games in human history is quite diverse and extensively documented. During fieldwork or while examining existing collections, archaeological researchers frequently encounter material evidence suitable for categorization as playthings. Regardless of their specific form—such as dice, worked potsherds, terracotta toy wheels, teetotums, pellets, marbles, or sling balls—these artefacts serve as tangible evidence of childhood (often overlooked in a dig) and the integration of leisure into the daily life of an ancient habitation.

As an essential component of human society, games are usually defined by the presence of an established set of rules, necessary skill, careful judgment, and the influence of probabilistic elements. Often the games that were played reflect a blend of mental and physical attributes, encompassing skill, chance, dexterity or simple recreational amusement. In such a context, the mastery of a game would require the ability to discern the distinction between potential outcomes and the likelihood of those results occurring. This session invites contributions that examine such games, activities that have been and remain vital in reinforcing interpersonal and inter-group relationships among community members across any time period. Ultimately, our objective extends beyond merely uncovering ancient artefacts through excavation and discovery and aims for a comprehensive understanding for reconstruction of the past, leveraging existing knowledge to uncover new insights into the unknown. We seek submissions that synthesize knowledge to offer a comprehensive understanding of rule-bound ancient games that relied on skill, judgment, and chance and to consolidate significant interpretations of ancient gaming from textual evidence.

**Keywords: leisure, play, community interaction, material evidence, skill, entertainment**