

# The Classic Period Peripheral Coastal Lowlands Ritual Ballgame Cult

Data source: Own research (PhD) and secondary literature

By Marijke Stoll, Indiana University - Bloomington

*\*Data Source entry, prepared based on data sourced from an external project.*

Entry tags: Indigenous Theology, Religious Practice, Mesoamerican Religions, Religious Group

The Classic Period Peripheral Coastal Lowlands Ritual Ballgame Cult was a highly ritualized ballgame featuring specific cosmological and sacrificial themes that was popular during the Classic period (CE 250-1000) in the Peripheral Coastal Lowlands interaction corridor of Mesoamerica. These areas included the coastal regions of the Mexican states Veracruz, Tabasco, Oaxaca, Chiapas as well as the Pacific coastal lowlands of Guatemala and El Salvador.



Date Range: 400 CE - 1000 CE

Region: Peripheral Coastal Lowlands

Region tags: North America, Mesoamerica and the Caribbean, Latin America and the Caribbean, Central America, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Mexico, Mesoamerica

The Peripheral Coastal Lowlands included the coastal regions of the Mexican states Veracruz, Tabasco, Oaxaca, Chiapas as well as the Pacific coastal lowlands of Guatemala and El Salvador.

## Status of Participants:

✓ Elite    ✓ Religious Specialists    ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

## Sources

Print sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Zeitlin, Judith Francis 1993 The Politics of Classic-Period Ritual Interaction. *Ancient Mesoamerica* 4(01): 121–140.
- Source 2: Winter, Marcus 2008 Classic to Postclassic in Four Regions: The Mazateca, the Chinantla, the Mixe Region, and the Southern Isthmus. In *After Monte Albán*. Jeffrey P. Blomster, ed. Pp. 393–426. Boulder, CO.: University Press of Colorado.
- Source 3: Zborover, Dan A. 2014 *Decolonizing Historical Archaeology in Southern Oaxaca, Mexico: Late Formative to Republican Periods*. University of Calgary.

## General Variables

### Membership/Group Interactions

Are other religious groups in cultural contact with target religion:

– Yes

↳ Is the cultural contact competitive:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: It is difficult to evaluate whether cultural contacts were competitive or not, although it is highly unlikely. The Classic Period Peripheral Coastal Lowlands ritual ballgame cult was an ideology with a suite of different practices and beliefs. Other religious and/or ethnolinguistic groups could deferentially adopt these practices as political strategies as they saw fit.

↳ Is the cultural contact accommodating/pluralistic:

– Yes

Notes: Given that the Classic Period Peripheral Coastal Lowlands ritual ballgame cult was an ideology with a suite of different practices and beliefs, other religious and/or ethnolinguistic groups could deferentially adopt these practices as political strategies as they saw fit. This is how the ritual ballgame cult spread from Central Veracruz to other regions of Mesoamerica.

↳ Is the cultural contact neutral:

– Yes

Notes: Again, the Classic Period Peripheral Coastal Lowlands ritual ballgame cult was an ideology with a suite of different practices and beliefs. Other religious and/or ethnolinguistic groups could deferentially adopt these practices as political strategies as they saw fit. These other groups also had their own practices and traditions related to the ballgame that would have been more relevant to their own cultures and sociopolitical relationships.

↳ Is there violent conflict (within sample region):

– Yes

Notes: Conflict occurred between ethnolinguistic groups for reasons other than religious motivations. However, participation in the ritual ballgame cult would have provided other social arenas for negotiating/avoiding conflict or reduced conflict.

↳ Is there violent conflict (with groups outside the sample region):

– Yes

Notes: Conflict occurred between ethnolinguistic groups for reasons other than religious motivations. However, who they would have fought with is unclear at the moment, as the evidence has not been found. However, we cannot assume based on lack of evidence that no such conflict took place, since we are considering a period of 600 years.

Does the religious group have a general process/system for assigning religious affiliation:

– No

Notes: Different ethnolinguistic groups, particularly the elite leaders of different communities, deferentially adopted practices, beliefs, and traditions present in the Peripheral Coastal Lowlands ritual ballgame cult.

Does the religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members:

– No

Does the religion have official political support

– Yes

Notes: The Classic period ritual ballgame cult originated in Central Veracruz, where it had its greatest apogee, and spread out from there. This is clearly evidenced by the imagery and numerous ballcourts at El Tajín (CE 600 - 1200), a large city located in Northwest Veracruz. In this region of Mesoamerica, the ritual ballgame cult was a critical part of political legitimization strategies for elites. This link between the political legitimacy and the ritual ballgame cult is evident in those other areas of the Peripheral Coastal Lowlands where the practices of the cult were adopted.

Is there a conception of apostasy in the religious group:

– No

## Size and Structure

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (estimated population, numerical):

– Field doesn't know

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (% of sample region population, numerical):

– Field doesn't know

Nature of religious group [please select one]:

– Large official religious group with smaller religious groups also openly allowed

Are there recognized leaders in the religious group:

– Yes

↳ Is there a hierarchy among these leaders:

– Yes

↳ A single leader of a local community:

– Yes

↳ Multiple religious communities each with its own leader, no hierarchy among these leaders:

– Yes

↳ "Regional" leaders who oversee one or more local leader(s) (e.g. bishops):

– No

↳ A single leader for the religious group that oversees all other leaders in the sample region:

– No

↳ A council or group of leaders for the religious group that oversees all other leaders in the sample region:

– No

↳ Estimate how many levels there are in the hierarchy of religious leadership:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: This would have depended on the specific community or ethnolinguistic group that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

↳ Are leaders believed to possess supernatural powers or qualities:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: More than likely it would have been believed that leaders had access to the supernatural, but not directly possessing these powers or qualities themselves. They did not make it rain, but their ritual actions towards the gods and their favorable viewing by said gods would have made it rain. Again though, this would have depended on the specific community or ethnolinguistic group that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

↳ Are religious leaders chosen:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: Inasmuch as political leaders were also religious leaders, but there also existed separate classes of religious specialists, sometimes these positions were assigned and more oftentimes they were inherited. Again, this would have depended on the specific community or ethnolinguistic group that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

↳ Are leaders considered fallible:

– Yes

Notes: If the rituals / practices carried out by the political/religious leaders were not successful, they could be killed or people of other status groups may revolt or simply leave.

↳ Charges of fallibility made by a leader's own followers:

– Yes

↳ Charges of fallibility made by other leaders in the religious group:

– Yes

↳ Charges of fallibility made by a political ruler:

– Yes

↳ Are close followers or disciples of a religious leader required to obediently and unquestionably accept the leader's pronouncements on all matters:

– No

Notes: Leaders' ability to rule frequently depended on the successful outcomes of the rituals and ceremonies they performed.

## Scripture

Does the religious group have scriptures:

Scripture is a generic term used to designate revered texts that are considered particularly authoritative and sacred relative to other texts. Strictly speaking, it refers to written texts, but there are also “oral scriptures” (e.g. the Vedas of India).

– Yes

↳ Are they written:

– No

Notes: Although not written, the ritual ballgame cult has clear imagery and symbolism related to it that are not found in frequent association with other ballgame practices.

↳ Are they oral:

– Yes

↳ Is there a story (or a set of stories) associated with the origin of scripture:

– Yes

↳ Revealed by a high god:

– No

↳ Revealed by other supernatural being:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: More than likely, the scripture relates to actions and practices of supernatural beings, but was not revealed by them.

- ↳ Inspired by high god:
  - No
- ↳ Inspired by other supernatural being:
  - Yes
- ↳ Originated from divine or semi-divine human beings:
  - Field doesn't know
  - Notes: Although this is a possibility.
- ↳ Originated from non-divine human being:
  - No

## Architecture, Geography

Is monumental religious architecture present:

– Yes

- ↳ In the average settlement, what percentage of area is taken up by all religious monuments:
  - Field doesn't know
  - Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.
- ↳ Size of largest single religious monument, square meters:
  - Field doesn't know
  - Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.
- ↳ Height of largest single religious monument, meters:
  - Field doesn't know
  - Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.
- ↳ Size of average monument, square meters:
  - Field doesn't know
  - Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

↳ Height of average monument, meters:  
– Field doesn't know  
Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

↳ In the largest settlement, what percentage of area is taken up by all religious monuments:  
– Percentage of area: 30  
Notes: Central ceremonial zone of El Tajín.

Are there different types of religious monumental architecture:

– Yes

↳ Tombs:  
– Yes

↳ Cemeteries:  
– Field doesn't know  
Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

↳ Temples:  
– Yes

↳ Altars:  
– Yes

↳ Devotional markers:  
– Yes

↳ Mass gathering point [plazas, courtyard, square. Places permanently demarcated using visible objects or structures]:  
– Yes

↳ Other type of religious monumental architecture:  
– Yes [specify]: Ballcourts

Is iconography present:

– Yes

↳ Where is iconography present [select all that apply]:

– Only religious public space

↳ Are there distinct features in the religious group's iconography:

– Yes

↳ Eyes (stylized or not):

– No

↳ Supernatural beings (zoomorphic):

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings (geomorphic):

– No

↳ Supernatural beings (anthropomorphic):

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings (abstract symbol):

– No

↳ Portrayals of afterlife:

– Field doesn't know

*Notes:* Some researchers have interpreted the famous ballcourt panels found on one of the courts at El Tajín may be portraying a supernatural realm, perhaps an afterlife.

↳ Aspects of doctrine (e.g. cross, trinity, Mithraic symbols):

– Yes

*Notes:* Symbols and icons specifically related to the ritual ballgame cult and its associated practices and beliefs.

↳ Humans:

– Yes

↳ Other features of iconography:



– Yes

Notes: Symbols related to agriculture, blood and semen.

Are there specific sites dedicated to sacred practice or considered sacred:

– Yes



Are sacred site oriented to environmental features:

"Environmental features" refers to features in the landscape, mountains, rivers, cardinal directions etc...

– Yes

Notes: But this would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult. However, it does occur with some frequency in communities throughout Mesoamerica.

Are pilgrimages present:

– Yes



How strict is pilgrimage:

– Field doesn't know

## Beliefs

### Burial and Afterlife

Is a spirit-body distinction present:

Answer "no" only if personhood (or consciousness) is extinguished with death of the physical body. Answering yes does not necessarily imply the existence of Cartesian mind/body dualism, merely that some element of personhood (or consciousness) survives the death of the body.

– Yes

Notes: But this is a general belief in Mesoamerica.



Spirit-mind is conceived of as having qualitatively different powers or properties than other body parts:

– Field doesn't know



Spirit-mind is conceived of as non-material, ontologically distinct from body:

– Field doesn't know



Other spirit-body relationship:

– Yes [specify]: Ancestors could be consulted for advice by their descendents.

#### Belief in afterlife:

– Yes

Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

↳ Is the spatial location of the afterlife specified or described by the religious group:

– Yes

↳ Afterlife in specified realm of space beyond this world:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

↳ Afterlife in vaguely defined "above" space:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

↳ Afterlife in vaguely defined "below" space:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

↳ Afterlife in vaguely defined horizontal space:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

↳ Afterlife located in "other" space:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

#### Reincarnation in this world:

– No

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses:

– Yes

↳ Cremation:

– No

↳ Mummification:

– No

↳ Interment:

– Yes

↳ Corpse is flexed (legs are bent or body is crouched):

– Yes

Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

↳ Corpse is extended (lying flat on front or back):

– Yes

Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

↳ Corpse is upright (where body is interred in standing position):

– No

↳ Corpse is interred some other way:

– Yes [specify]: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

↳ Cannibalism:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult, but not highly likely.

↳ Exposure to elements (e.g. air drying):

– No

↳ Feeding to animals:

– No

↳ Secondary burial:

– Yes

Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult. The bodies of revered/sacred ancestors would sometimes be reburied in other interments.

↳ Re-treatment of corpse:

– Yes

Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult. Sometimes tombs would be reopened and revered/sacred ancestors would be re-treated. There was particular focus on the femurs.

↳ Other intensive (in terms of time or resources expended) treatment of corpse :

– Field doesn't know

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

Are grave goods present:

– Yes

↳ Personal effects:

– Yes

↳ Valuable items:

– Yes

↳ Significant wealth (e.g. gold, jade, intensely worked objects):

– Yes

↳ Some wealth (some valuable or useful objects interred):

– Yes

↳ Other valuable/precious items interred:

– Yes [specify]: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

- ↳ Other grave goods:
  - Yes

Are formal burials present:

– Yes

- ↳ As cenotaphs:
  - No

- ↳ In cemetery:
  - Field doesn't know

Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult. Some communities may have had cemeteries and others not.

- ↳ Family tomb-crypt:
  - Yes

- ↳ Domestic (individuals interred beneath house, or in areas used for normal domestic activities):
  - No

- ↳ Other formal burial type:
  - Yes [specify]: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

## Supernatural Beings

Are supernatural beings present:

– Yes

- ↳ A supreme high god is present:
  - No

- ↳ Previously human spirits are present:
  - Yes

- ↳ Human spirits can be seen:

– No

↳ Human spirits can be physically felt:

– Yes

↳ Previously human spirits have knowledge of this world:

– Yes

Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

↳ Human spirits' knowledge restricted to particular domain of human affairs:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Human spirits' knowledge restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Human spirits' knowledge unrestricted within the sample region:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Human spirits' knowledge unrestricted outside of sample region:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Human spirits can see you everywhere normally visible (in public):

– No

↳ Human spirits can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home):

– No

↳ Human spirit's can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives):

– Field doesn't know

↳ Human spirits know your basic character (personal essence):

– Field doesn't know

↳ Human spirits know what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight):

– Field doesn't know

↳ Human spirits have other form(s) of knowledge regarding this world:

– Yes [specify]: Venerated ancestors are often consulted for advice in political situations.

↳ Human spirits have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

↳ Human spirits can reward:

– Yes

↳ Human spirits can punish:

– No

↳ Human spirits have indirect causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

↳ Human spirits have memory of life:

– Yes

↳ Human spirits exhibit positive emotion:

– Yes

↳ Human spirits exhibit negative emotion:

– Yes

↳ Human spirits possess hunger:

– Yes

Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

↳ Human spirits possess/exhibit some other feature:

– Yes [specify]: They can also have thirst.

Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

↳ Human spirits communicate with the living:

– Yes

Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

↳ In waking, everyday life:

– Field doesn't know

↳ In dreams:

– Field doesn't know

↳ In trance possession:

– Yes

↳ Through divination processes:

– Yes

↳ Only through specialists:

– No

Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult. While specialists primarily consulted with venerated ancestors, non-elites would have ways to contact theirs.

↳ Only through monarch:

– No

↳ Communicate with living through other means:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Non-human supernatural beings are present:

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings can be seen:

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings can be physically felt:

– Yes



↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge of this world:

– Yes

Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge restricted to particular domain of human affairs:

– No

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region:

– No

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge unrestricted within the sample region:

– Yes

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge unrestricted outside of sample region:

– Yes

↳ Non-human supernatural beings can see you everywhere normally visible (in public):

– Yes

↳ Non-human supernatural beings can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home):

– Field doesn't know

↳ Non-human supernatural beings can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives):

– Field doesn't know

↳ Non-human supernatural beings knows your basic character (personal essence):

– No

↳ Non-human supernatural beings know what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight):

– No

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have other knowledge of this world:

– Yes [specify]: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings can reward:

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings can punish:

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings have indirect causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings exhibit positive emotion:

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings exhibit negative emotion:

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings possess hunger:

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings possess/exhibit some other feature:

– Yes [specify]: Supernatural beings exhibit a range of human emotions and needs.

↳ Mixed human-divine beings are present:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult. There are stories of human beings who become divine figures, but these stories are not recorded for the Peripheral Coastal Lowlands.

↳ Does the religious group possess a variety of supernatural beings:

– Yes

↳ Organized by kinship based on a family model:

– Yes

↳ Organized hierarchically:

– Yes

Notes: While there is an original creator couple/god, and some are more powerful than others, this hierarchical organization is not strict and would have varied according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

↳ Power of beings is domain specific:

– Yes

↳ Other organization for pantheon:

– Yes [specify]: Some gods had avatars or different versions, but this would have varied according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

## Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present:

This refers to surveillance by supernatural beings of humans' behaviour and/or thought particularly as it relates to social norms or potential norm violations.

– Field doesn't know

Notes: This would vary according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult. This is better documented for Postclassic ethnolinguistic groups such as the Mexica.

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment:

– Yes

Notes: Generally assumed to be failure in the performance of rituals and ceremonies, or loss of favor by the political/religious leaders from the supernatural beings.

↳ Is the cause or agent of supernatural punishment known:

– Yes

Notes: Punishment was usually in the form of agricultural failures or defeat in conflict and in ballgames.

↳ Done only by high god:

– No

- ↳ Done by many supernatural beings:
  - Yes
- ↳ Done through impersonal cause-effect principle:
  - No
- ↳ Done by other entities or through other means [specify]
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Is the reason for supernatural punishment known:
  - Yes
  - ↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence:
    - Yes
  - ↳ Done to enforce group norms:
    - Yes
  - ↳ Done to inhibit selfishness:
    - No
  - ↳ Done randomly:
    - No
  - ↳ Other [specify]
    - Yes
    - Notes: Failure in the performance of rituals and ceremonies, or loss of favor by the political/religious leaders from the supernatural beings.
- ↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in the afterlife:
  - No
- ↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in this lifetime:
  - Yes
  - ↳ Supernatural punishments in this life are highly emphasized by the religious group:

– No

↳ Punishment in this life consists of bad luck:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of political failure:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of defeat in battle:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of crop failure or bad weather:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of disaster on journeys.

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of mild sensory displeasure:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Punishment in this life consists of extreme sensory displeasure:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Punishment in this life consists of sickness or illness:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of impaired reproduction:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Punishment in this life consists of bad luck visited on descendants:

– Yes

↳ Other [specify]

– Field doesn't know

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards:

– Yes

↳ Is the cause/purpose of supernatural rewards known:

– Yes

↳ Done only by high god:

– Yes

↳ Done by many supernatural beings:

– Yes

↳ Done through impersonal cause-effect principle:

– No

↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence:

– Yes

↳ Done to enforce group norms:

– Yes

↳ Done to inhibit selfishness:

– No

↳ Done randomly:

– No

↳ Supernatural rewards are bestowed out in the afterlife:

– No

↳ Supernatural rewards are bestowed out in this lifetime:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural rewards in this life are highly emphasized by the religious group:

– Yes

↳ Reward in this life consists of good luck:

– Yes

↳ Reward in this life consists of political success or power:

– Yes

↳ Reward in this life consists of success in battle:

– Yes

↳ Reward in this life consists of peace or social stability:

– Yes

↳ Reward in this life consists of healthy crops or good weather:

– Yes

↳ Reward in this life consists of success on journeys:

– Yes

↳ Reward in this life consists of mild sensory pleasure:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Reward in this life consists of extreme sensory pleasure:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Reward in this life consists of enhanced health:

– Yes

↳ Reward in this life consists of enhanced reproductive success:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Reward in this life consists of fortune visited on descendants:

– Yes

↳ Other [specify]

– Field doesn't know

## Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present:

– No

Is an eschatology present:

– No

### Norms and Moral Realism

Are general social norms prescribed by the religious group:

– Field doesn't know

Is there a conventional vs. moral distinction in the religious group:

– No

## Practices

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### Membership Costs and Practices

Does membership in this religious group require celibacy (full sexual abstinence):

– No

Does membership in this religious group require constraints on sexual activity (partial sexual abstinence):

– No

Does membership in this religious group require castration:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require fasting:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require forgone food opportunities (taboos on desired foods):

– No

Does membership in this religious group require permanent scarring or painful bodily alterations:

– Field doesn't know



Does membership in this religious group require painful physical positions or transitory painful wounds:

– Yes

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of adults:

"Adults" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition of a human who is 18-years-old or older and who is legally responsible for his/her actions, then please specify that difference in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– Yes

↳ Foreign, slaves:

– No

↳ Commoners:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: This is a possibility but highly unlikely and would have varied according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame cult.

↳ Elites:

– Yes

↳ Other:

– Yes [specify]: Ballgame players who were likely of high-status.

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of children:

"Children" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition, please specify that different in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Does membership in this religious group require self-sacrifice (suicide):

– Yes

Notes: This would be auto-sacrifice, involving the cutting of the genitals, tongues, arms and ears.

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of property/valuable items:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of time (e.g., attendance at meetings or services, regular prayer, etc.):

– Yes

Notes: Playing and attending ballgames and attendant ceremonies/rituals.

Does membership in this religious group require physical risk taking:

– Yes

Notes: Playing ballgames, auto-sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require accepting ethical precepts:

– Field doesn't know

Does membership in this religious group require marginalization by out-group members:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require participation in small-scale rituals (private, household):

– Field doesn't know

Does membership in this religious group require participation in large-scale rituals:

I.e. involving two or more households; includes large-scale “ceremonies” and “festivals.”

– Yes



On average, for large-scale rituals how many participants gather in one location:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: This would have varied according to the specific community that participated in the ritual ballgame culture.



What is the average interval of time between performances (in hours):

Performances here refers to large-scale rituals.

– Field doesn't know



Are there orthodoxy checks:

Orthodoxy checks are mechanisms used to ensure that rituals are interpreted in a standardized way, e.g. through the supervisory prominence of a professionalized priesthood or other system of governance, appeal to texts detailing the proper interpretation, etc.

– Yes

Notes: While not definitive, it was probably likely in order to assure the success of the rituals.



Are there orthopraxy checks:

Orthopraxy checks are mechanisms used to ensure that rituals are performed in a standardized way, e.g. through the supervisory prominence of a professionalized priesthood or other system of governance, appeal to texts detailing the proper procedure, etc.

– Yes

Notes: While not definitive, it was highly likely to assure the success of rituals.

↳ Does participation entail synchronic practices:

– Yes

↳ Is there use of intoxicants:

– Yes

Are extra-ritual in-group markers present:

E.g. special changes to appearance such as circumcision, tattoos, scarification, etc.

– No

Does the group employ fictive kinship terminology:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: But highly unlikely.

## Society and Institutions

### Levels of Social Complexity

The society to which the religious group belongs is best characterized as (please choose one):

– Other [specify in comments]

Notes: Range of social complexity depended on the community that participated in the ballgame ritual cult. At the very least, these would have been socially complex communities with elite status groups living in large, organized settlements. Some of these settlements would have been urban centers.

### Welfare

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized famine relief:

– No

Is famine relief available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: More than likely.

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized poverty relief:

– No

Is poverty relief available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: More than likely, if agricultural resources were pooled.

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized care for the elderly and infirm:

– No

Is institutionalized care for the elderly and infirm available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: Elderly and infirm would have been taken care of by their kin group.

## Education

Does the religious group provide formal education to its adherents:

– No

Is formal education available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: This would have depended on the specific community participating in the ritual ballgame cult. Larger settlements likely provided education for certain status groups.

## Bureaucracy

Do the group's adherents interact with a formal bureaucracy within their group:

– Yes

Notes: Bureaucracy would have included religious specialists, political leaders, and other members of higher status.

Do the group's adherents interact with other institutional bureaucracies:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: There would not have been multiple institutional bureaucracies.

## Public Works

Does the religious group in question provide public food storage:

– No

Is public food storage provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Does the religious group in question provide water management (irrigation, flood control):

– No

Is water management provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Does the religious group in question provide transportation infrastructure:

– No

Is transportation infrastructure provided for the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

## Taxation

Does the religious group in question levy taxes or tithes:

– Yes

Notes: Inasmuch as the religious/political leaders extract agricultural and labor taxes from their communities.

Are taxes levied on the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

## Enforcement

Does the religious group in question provide an institutionalized police force:

– No

Do the group's adherents interact with an institutionalized police force provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized judges:

– No

Do the group's adherents interact with an institutionalized judicial system provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Does the religious group in question enforce institutionalized punishment:

– Field doesn't know

Are the group's adherents subject to institutionalized punishment enforced by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Field doesn't know

Does the religious group in question have a formal legal code:

– No

Are the group's adherents subject to a formal legal code provided by institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

## Warfare

Does religious group in question possess an institutionalized military:

– Yes

Notes: Inasmuch as the political/religious leaders are in charge of a militarized force.



Does the religious group in question have the power to conscript:

– Yes



Does the religious group in question maintain a full-time military corps (e.g. Swiss Guard):

– No

↳ Does the religious group in question maintain a standing army:

– No

Do the group's adherents participate in an institutionalized military provided by institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Are the group's adherents protected by or subject to an institutionalized military provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

### Written Language

Does the religious group in question possess its own distinct written language:

– No

Is a non-religion-specific written language available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Is a non-religion-specific written language used by the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

### Calendar

Does the religious group in question possess a formal calendar:

– Yes

Is a formal calendar provided for the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

### Food Production

Does the religious group in question provide food for themselves:

– Yes

Notes: Inasmuch that these settlements were largely agricultural.

↳ Please characterize the forms/level of food production [choose all that apply]:

- Gathering
- Hunting (including marine animals)
- Fishing
- Small-scale agriculture / horticultural gardens or orchards
- Large-scale agriculture (e.g., monocropping, organized irrigation systems)

Is food provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

- No

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### General References

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