

Women and Sport in Mesopotamia

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Archaeological and literary evidence were utilized to examine the evidence of women in sport in Mesopotamia. Sport in this study included physical activities and recreational activities of the Mesopotamians. What is a fact is that activities involving women were rarely recorded, and for every artifact involving women there were at least a hundred which depicted men.

Visitations were made, two in most cases, to the major museums and archaeological sites in Iraq, such as Nimrud, Babylon, Nineveh, Ur and Bagdad. Moreover, two separate visits were made to the British Museum in London, where the finest collection of Mesopotamian artifacts is maintained. The evidence presented was of the Sumerian, Hittite, Assyrian and Iranian civilizations, the latter including the Archaemenians, the Parthians, and the Sassanians. The theses by Meikle and Spier are the outstanding works in this area and were invaluable sources as well.

The overall picture was both clear and consistent with respect to the participation of women in physical or recreational activities among the Mesopotamians. Music, dancing, game boards and toys seem to have been the activities indulged in by women and girls, and appeared in virtually each civilization cited. Other ancient western civilizations, such as the Greeks and the Minoans, revealed a greater diversity of activities. It is possible that these activities - music, dancing, game boards and toys - mirror the society, and that women participated in but a few, socially approved activities. Or it may simply be that our observations may be incorrect as they are simply a function of the available evidence. As Gottschalk put it:

. . . only a part of what was observed in the past was remembered by those who observed it; only a part of what was remembered was recorded; only a part of what was recorded has survived; only a part of what has survived has come to the historian's attention; only a part of what has come to their attention is credible; only a part of what is credible has been grasped; and only a part of what has been grasped can be expounded or narrated by the historian.



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