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# Women in Sport: The Biblical Ur of the Chaldees

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The Biblical Ur of the Chaldees is the ancestral home of Abraham, the patriarch of the Hebrew tribes. Located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the great Biblical city today lies in ruin in modern day Iraq. Historically, Ur of the Chaldees is one of several great Biblical cities in the land of Shinar, or what is known to us as Babylon. Genesis 10:10 and 11:1 speak of the mighty cities of Shinar such as Erech, Akkad and Ur as well as the building of the great tower of Babel. Archaeologists have done extensive excavations of the area since 1920. Cuneiform tablets, gold and silver jewelry, musical instruments, weapons, votive offerings, stelae, cylinder seals, human remains and temple ruins abound from the diggings. From these artifacts historians are able to reproduce a very perceptive conception of life in the ancient Ur of the Chaldees.

However, in the past, historical sport or recreation research concerning both men and women has been limited for two reasons. First, few religious scholars or Sumerologists have researched the cuneiform tablets and artifacts specifically for sport or recreation information. Second, most Near Eastern scholars have dismissed the possibility of sport or recreation in Sumer because of the all-consuming theocratic culture. However, new research by this writer shows that sport and recreation pursuits by men and women did occur. Study at the British Museum, the University of Chicago Oriental Institute, and the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, show that even though the ultimate goal of the sport or leisure activity may have been worship, the immediate experience was enjoyed for what it was: sport and recreation.

The leisure activities of the common man and woman as well as the Royal household are reviewed in this study. For example, a translated cuneiform text shows that Shulgi, one of five kings of the period, was involved in many sporting activities. A hunter, sportsman, and bon vivant, Shulgi lead an active recreational life. Texts also show that wrestling, boxing, archery, chariot driving and acrobatics occurred.

The women of Ur also had an active social, political, cultural, and religious life. Dressed in elaborate costumes and adorned with heavy jewelry and make-up, the upper class women spent most of their time in household preparations for their men. They entertained their husbands with board games and seductive dances. Some of the more fortunate and beautiful women were selected as temple prostitutes and spent their hours either in the ziggurate compounds or on ornately built sailing vessels. The text of this study reviews these activities as well as a variety of other pursuits.