From Ollamaliztli to Pelota mixteca and beyond : the role of globalization in the historical development of an indigenous Mexican ballgame

Berger, M.E.

CHAPTER 3. Pelota mixteca and the Pre-Columbian Ballgame(s)

Introduction

Considering the arguments presented in the previous chapter, we can assume that pelota mixteca – or, better said, Pelota a Mano (Fría) – was introduced to Mexico by Europeans, most probably Spaniards, sometime during the 16th, 17th or 18th centuries. Given that the 16th-century European hand-ballgame originally developed mainly in monasteries in Europe, and was played by monks and since an important part of the initial colonizers were friars and missionaries, the spread of this game may have occurred relatively early in the Colonial period. In Chihuahua, for example, a form of Basque handball was introduced in the 1560s by Francisco de Ibarra, who had received the encomienda of the province. Somewhat further afield, pelota a mano was played in Chile as early as 1536. Franciscan friars introduced the game of pelota in Occopa, Peru in 1725, where the game quickly gained popularity throughout the whole province and developed into a local game with specific rules, called *pelotaris* (Urza 1995).

In this context, the phrasing used by early 16th-century chroniclers while describing the way in which the pre-Columbian ballgame is played is significant. For instance, Fray Juan de Torquemada, in his *Monarquía Indiana,* refers to the owner of a pre-Columbian ballcourt as "El Dueño del Trinquete" (1969 [1615]:553) and notes on the *ollama* court that "llámase el lugar adonde se jugaba tlachco, que es como entre nosotros trinquete" (1975-1983 [1615], lib. XIV:342). To this day, the court in which Spanish handball games are played is called *trinquete*, or, in the case of *pilota valenciana, trinquet.* When describing the rules of the indigenous game, Torquemada, who copied some of his information on the ballgame from the work of Motolinia, also explicitly compares *ollama* to Spanish handball games: "los que echaban [la pelota] por cima de la pared de frente o a tapar en la pared, ganaban una raya […] y a tantas rayas primeras iba todo el juego, no hacían chazas" (1975-1983 [1615], lib. XIV: 342). The chronicler Motolinia (1971[1858]:381-2) refers to the stopping of the ball in *ollamaliztli* as making a "chaza", the term used for stopping a ball in the traditional Spanish ballgames. It is clear that both Spanish chroniclers use European parallels to describe indigenous phenomena and concepts, in order to explain them to their European audiences. Torquemada equates the I-shaped ball court in which *ollama* was played with the traditional arena for Spanish handball games and both Torquemada and Motolinía use the concept of the *chaza* from the Spanish games to explain the scoring system of the Mesoamerican game. Clearly these 16th century

chroniclers, who were both Franciscan monks, were familiar with the European handball games, as were other Spanish missionaries, and could have taught the indigenous Mexicans how to play.
The introduction of this new Spanish handball game was probably motivated not only by the Spaniards' love of the game, but especially by the prohibition of indigenous (religious) customs that took place after the Spanish Conquest. After the Spaniards had conquered the Aztecs, a process of conversion began in which anything that was even remotely related to indigenous rituals was banned and replaced by customs of which Christianity approved. Many Spaniards were deeply impressed by the qualities of the rubber balls that they saw for the first time, as well as by the ability of the players. In the words of Fray Diego Durán: "si ver jugar á la pelota con las manos á los de nuestra nación nos da tanto contento y espanto de ver la destreza y ligereza con que algunos la juegan cuanto mas alabaremos a los que con tanta maña y destreza y gentileza la juegan con las asentaderas" (Durán 1967[1581]: 242). Still, one of the things that the Spanish missionaries forbade was the playing of the Mesoamerican ballgame, not only because of the cosmological and religious importance of the sport, but also because of the physical danger that it presented to the players, and the conflicts that arose within and between communities because of the games (Bushnell 1970:1, 17). As Juan de Pomar puts it in his *Relación de Texcoco* (1582), "al presente no lo juegan porque al principio de su conversión se les prohibió por los frailes, pensando que en él había algunos hechizos o enconmiendas y pactos con el demonio."
However, around the time of the Conquest the hipball game was by no means solely a ritual game. It also had important social functions in a profane setting and was rooted firmly in the social structure of Mesoamerican societies. It was played as a regular pastime by the elites (Sahagún 1977[1569]:299) – and probably also by commoners (Durán 1967[1570]:209) -, during non-religious festivals, such as at markets (Durán 1967[1570]:200), and a formal court for playing was not even a necessity (Durán 1967[1570]:206). Many chroniclers, (e.g. Durán (1967[1570]:207-209), Sahagún (1977[1569]:299), Torquemada (1975-1983 [1615]: Lib. XIV)) note that, like in today's pelota mixteca, betting on the outcome of the games was an integral – if not constitutive – part of the actions surrounding the ballgame. Durán (1967[1570]:208) even mentions that professional players were supported by the elite to compete in matches against the players of other rulers. It seems that, more than being only a game played at religious festivals with a profound cosmological and religious significance, the hipball game was a social act. The game ranged from some people getting together and playing on a dirt court to a spectacle inside a *tlachco*, in which many people gathered to witness games where valuables and prestige were at stake (Miller and Houston 1987; de la Garza and Izquierdo 1980:333). In this sense, *ollama* was similar to modern-day sports like football or

basketball which can be played by children, amateurs and professionals alike, in widely differing contexts.

As a result, when the Spanish administration banned the playing of *ullamaliztli*, a void was created in the indigenous social structure, especially with regards to indigenous pastimes. While the religious/cosmological void was filled by rituals in church, a space was also created for the introduction of new games and some indigenous individuals and communities adopted the Spanish game of *pelota a mano* or *llargues* as a substitute for the pre-Columbian ballgame. If this hypothesis is correct, it would mean that pelota mixteca - while formally being a Spanish game – takes a similar place in the social structure of today's indigenous communities, when compared to pre-Columbian society. As such, it can in some way be seen as a continuation of a pre-Columbian practice, since there is a significant experiential continuity. Since the adoption of the game took place at an early moment during the Colonial period, the game has been played by many generations of Mixtecs and Zapotecs, and is by now an original indigenous game.

A possible implicit confirmation of this hypothesized early (16th century) adoption of Pelota a Mano by indigenous communities, is the difference in modern-day Mexico in the social status of pelota mixteca and the different modalities of Pelota Vasca, which are formally very similar. While Pelota mixteca is played by *indígenas*, and is considered to be an indigenous game which is confined to the social sphere of (rural) communities, Pelota Vasca is played both in rural and urban settings and by members of different social classes. We also see this divide in the description by Basilio Rojas (1958) of games played in Miahuatlán, a town in the Zapotec area of southern Oaxaca, at the beginning of the 20th century. While Pelota Vasca was popular before the Mexican Revolution but disappeared after peace returned to the country, pelota a mano fría (pelota mixteca) was continuously played from long before the Mexican Revolution up to the present day. This implies that pelota a mano fría was much more firmly rooted in rural/*indígena* society at the beginning of the 20th century than Pelota Vasca, which was probably introduced sometime in the mid-19th century. While this is no proof of the early introduction of Pelota mixteca, it does suggest that Pelota mixteca – or, actually, Pelota a Mano Fria – was already a well-established sport among *indígenas* at the start of the 19th century; this suggests that Pelota mixteca has been an indigenous game for at least 200 years, and probably more. But how did this Spanish introduction come to be seen as an indigenous game, especially since the Spanish games still exist and are still played in Mexico?

From pelota to pelota mixteca

When discussing the consequences of globalization for the creation of new (hybrid) cultures, Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2009: 86) asks "are cultural elements different merely because they originate from different cultures?" In the case of *pelota a mano* and *ullamaliztli* we could indeed question whether they are. Of course, the way of playing the games is widely different, and the profound religious significance of the Mesoamerican ballgame gave this game a dimension that did not exist in the European context. Nonetheless, as we have seen, the 'profane version' of the Mesoamerican ballgame was largely socially comparable to the Spanish games, which also included bets and were played by commoners and elites alike. Because of this "transcultural compatibility" (*ibid.*: 84), the introduction of *pelota a mano* may have taken place relatively fluidly. But how did *pelota a mano* come to be seen as *pelota mixteca*? To my mind there are four main factors that are particularly important in this process of *indigenization*

1. the early adoption of the game by indigenous peoples,
2. the unfamiliarity of researchers and players with traditional European games,
3. the local developments that took place, and
4. the change in the name of the game.

Because pelota a mano was introduced to Mexico at an early point in the Colonial era, the game has been played by indigenous Mexicans for hundreds of years and has become an indigenous game. Despite its formal Spanish origin, it has become firmly rooted into the social lives of indigenous, and non-indigenous, rural communities in Mexico. When modern sports and games such as football, basketball and volleyball were introduced, *pelota a mano fría/pelota mixteca* was positioned as the traditional alternative against which these modern games were contrasted. This automatically led to a view of pelota mixteca as a traditional, if not an indigenous, game.

At the same time, the traditional Spanish games, which formed the basis from which pelota mixteca developed, have lost their popularity over the past 100 to 150 years. Whereas, up to the end of the 19th century, the Spanish games were the only sports/games that were played on a large scale in Mexico, the early 20th century introduction of modern sports like baseball, basketball and soccer, has driven the more traditional European sports to the background, to the point that they are in the same marginalized position in Europe as *pelota mixteca* is in Mexico. Since most players of the game (as well as most anthropologists and archaeologists) are not familiar with traditional European sports, the obvious similarities between the games were not recognized.

An interesting parallel in this respect can be seen in the game of *taladxi*, which is played in the southern Isthmus region of the state of Oaxaca. *Taladxi* is a form of baseball (the most popular sport

in lowland, tropical Mexico) in which exactly the same rules are used as in regular baseball, but which is played with bare hands and a soft ball, instead of a baseball bat and a regular baseball. Players of *taladxi* are all aware that the sport they are playing is but a modified version of baseball, since baseball is a sport many of them are avid fans of. However, if baseball were to lose its popularity in the US and become a little-known sport in Mexico, the knowledge of the rules (and existence) of baseball would be lost. As a consequence, it is quite probable that, over the course of several centuries, *taladxi* would come to be seen as a purely indigenous game, especially because the word *taladxi* is related to the 16th century Zapotec name *làchi* for the pre-Columbian rubber ball (Córdova 1942[1578]). *Pelota mixteca* followed this specific historical trajectory, from a sport that was played by many Europeans and adopted by indigenous members of Colonial society, to a sport that has been all but forgotten by Mexican mainstream society, but is a lively tradition inside Mexico's indigenous communities. This fact also accounts for the lack of descriptions of *pelota mixteca* in pre-20th century historical sources. Since traditional European sports were widely known and practiced before the early 20th century introduction of North American sports cultures, no chronicler or traveler would consider describing the game as a rarity of the land.

Regardless of the general lack of knowledge on the finesses of traditional European games, even a spectator with knowledge of these games might not immediately identify *pelota mixteca* as a game of European origin, because of the developments in playing equipment that have occurred over the last 100 years. The gloves for pelota mixteca de hule, as well as the rubber balls that are used in the game, have no direct equivalents in Europe. The introduction of the gloves has significantly altered the general style of play of pelota mixteca de hule from a fast-paced game in which a small ball is hit between two teams over shorter distances, to a somewhat slower game in which balls can easily fly distances of over 50 meters. Similarly, the boards and balls for pelota mixteca de esponja, which were introduced as a reaction to the creation of the gloves for pelota mixteca de hule, are local inventions that have significantly altered the way the game looks to outsiders.

A last, relatively obvious reason that *pelota mixteca* is seen as a game of indigenous origin in today's society is the name of the game. However, whether we should see this as a cause or a consequence is debatable. Clearly, the name of the game is a marker of its indigenous status and can be seen as one of the factors contributing to *pelota mixteca*'s 'indigenous representation'. However, the name *pelota mixteca* only originated at the beginning of the twentieth century and was chosen because the game was already seen as an indigenous tradition at the time. As such, while the name of the game strengthens its representation as a purely indigenous tradition, it is actually a consequence of the game's indigenous status in the early twentieth century.

Pelota mixteca and pre-Columbian ballgames

In the foregoing I have tried to outline why I think that *pelota mixteca* is a game of European origin, which was indigenized over the course of the past five centuries. However, there is no clear consensus within the archaeological community on *pelota mixteca*'s origins and its relationship to the Mesoamerican ballgame. Most recently, Eric Taladoire has argued that, though it exhibits obvious traces of European games, *pelota mixteca* can be confidently traced up to "late pre-Hispanic times" (Taladoire 2003:329). While Taladoire accepts Gillmeister's (1988) arguments for the European influences on Pelota mixteca, he does not see these as an argument against a pre-Columbian origin. On the contrary, he states that "accepting Gillmeister's arguments reinforces, and almost implicitly confirms, the pre-Hispanic origin of the Mixtec game" (*ibid.*: 328). Taladoire has suggested that the only possible answer to the question "why would a Spanish game become so popular in several areas of Mesoamerica – specifically in Oaxaca?" would be that "at the time of the Conquest, a local game existed that was already similar to the European games and was further influenced by them, giving birth to the present *pelota mixteca*" (*ibid.*: 328; see also Stoll 2014: 57). For this assertion to be true, a game similar to *pelota mixteca* – or, more accurately, to the game of *pelota a mano* as played during the 16th century – has to be attested for. While the hip-ballgame *ullamaliztli* is well-known, other ballgames of the Mexico are less well researched and described. In the following section, I will examine pre-Columbian and early colonial sources to determine if any game can be identified that would be remotely similar to Spanish *pelota a mano* and would be a good candidate for Taladoire's hypothesized pre-Columbian local game.

Pre-Columbian ballgames

The three most significant edited volumes on ballgames in Mesoamerica are called "The Mesoamerican Ballgame" (van Bussel, van Dongen, and Leyenaar 1991), "The Mesoamerican Ballgame" (Scarborough and Wilcox 1991), and "The Sport of Life and Death: The Mesoamerican Ballgame" (Whittington 2001). The titles of these books all imply one thing: that only one ballgame was played in Mesoamerica, the well-known hip-ballgame, called *ollamaliztli* by the Aztecs. This idea has been questioned repeatedly since the 1940s (Stern 1949), and multiple authors have suggested the existence of other types of pre-Columbian ballgame, mainly on the basis of iconographical, ethnographical, and ethnohistorical data (Cohodas 1991:251; Hellmuth 1991: 135; Greene Robertson 1991:107; Pasztory 1976; Taladoire 1981, 2003:319; Taladoire and Colsenet 1991:162, a.o.). Among the examples that have been given are a stick-ballgame represented in the murals of Tepantitla (Pasztory 1976; Uriarte 2006), and a possible hand-ballgame depicted at the archaeological site of Dainzú in the state of Oaxaca (Bernal 1968; Bernal and Seuffert 1979; Bernal

and Oliveros 1988; Taladoire 2003; Urcid n.d.). Since this last game has repeatedly been linked to *pelota mixteca* in the archaeological literature, it will form the primary focus of this chapter.

A note on sources, methods and scope

The following discussion takes a rather simplistic question as its main focus – 'was there or wasn't there a pre-Columbian handball game in Mesoamerica, that could be the precursor of modern-day pelota mixteca?' Because of the narrow scope of this question, many ballgame-related questions and much related material will not be discussed in this work. Some sources of information that have formed the basis for our understanding of the pre-Columbian hipball game, such as the Popol Vuh for example, are not discussed, exactly because they are clearly related to the 'classic' pre-Columbian game and will not provide any additional insight into the possible existence of a handball game. Because of the clear visual presence of the hipball game in Maya material, Maya culture is relatively underrepresented in this work, despite the prominent attention that the ballgame among the Classic Maya has received in the literature. While I will make reference to some material from the Maya area, such as ceramic figurines from Lubaantún, a stela from the site of El Baúl and several painted vases, I will only do this when this material is relevant to the question of the existence of a handball game. Since much of the iconographic material that has been interpreted as depicting a handball game comes from Central Mexico and Oaxaca, and because pelota mixteca originated in Oaxaca, these regions will be the primary focus of the discussion. As a result, it may seem like I have not taken into account any source material from the Maya area. This is not the case, however. I did study ballgame-related iconography from the Maya area, both in vase painting and in sculptural programs from archaeological sites, but this research was not included in the following discussion, due to the fact that I only found examples of the hipball game represented. Having said this, it is clear that two different types of hipball are depicted in the Classic Maya corpus (Cohodas 1991; Fox 1996; Coe 2003). There is a marked difference between those players depicted wearing the traditional yugo around their waist, and those that wear a much larger barrel-like type of gear that covers a large part of their upper body. In addition, the architectural context for these two types of games might have differed (see Miller and Houston 1987). However, since none of these games is considered a handball game, a discussion of the possible differences in form and meaning of these games falls outside the scope of this work.

For the same reason, the ritual content of the hipball game is not discussed in this work, despite its obvious importance to Mesoamerican cultures in general. From the indigenous codices that show important religious and political events taking place inside I-shaped ballcourts (e.g Codex Bodley/Ñuu Tnoo 10, Codex Borgia/Yoalli Ehecatl 21r., 42r.), to the 16th-century chroniclers that

described the rituals that took place in relation to the ballgame (e.g. Sahagún 1977[1569]) and contemporary archaeologists and anthropologists who have worked on interpretations of the meaning of the ballgame, the cosmological, socio-political and religious significance of the hipball game has been amply documented and studied. However, as has been noted by several authors before (e.g. Cohodas 1991: 253; Taladoire and Colsenet 1991: 162), it is an illusion to speak of 'the Mesoamerican ballgame', considering the temporal and regional variety that must have existed. The ballgame has been variously interpreted as related to fertility rituals (e.g. Gillespie 1991), the Venus cycle and the Underworld (e.g. Wilkerson 1991), a metaphorical representation of the movement of the sun across the sky (e.g. Stern 1949), the death and rebirth of the Maize God (e.g. Miller 2001), and an interface between the world of man and Xibalba (e.g. Fox 1991), to name but a few interpretations. Basic themes that are generally considered to characterize the ritual significance of the hipball game are duality – between life and death, wet and dry, darkness and light, etc.– and fertility, related both to the cycle of the sun and the life cycle of maize (Bradley 2001; Gillespie 1991; Stevenson Day 2001; Taladoire and Colsenet 1991; Parsons 1991; Uriarte 2001).
Undoubtedly, the ritual significance of the ballgame changed over the course of the 3,000 years that it was played across Mesoamerica. Hence, it is impossible to argue for one specific meaning of the ballgame to all Mesoamerican cultures across time. Moreover, as has been remarked by Marvin Cohodas (1991), if a handball game indeed existed in Mesoamerica before the Spanish invasion, it would be highly unlikely that this game had the same cosmological/ritual significance as the hipball game. As a result, a thorough discussion of the ritual aspects of the Mesoamerican ballgame in general, or even the significance of the hipball game in Late Postclassic Oaxaca, falls outside of the scope of this work. For more information on these important aspects of the game, the reader is referred to the classic collections of essays on the topic (van Bussel, van Dongen and Leyenaar 1991; Scarborough and Wilcox 1991; Whittington 2001), as well as to Eric Taladoire's (2012) recent excellent bibliography on the ballgame and ballcourts.

With these limitations in mind, in the following I will focus on sources that are either spatially or temporally related to pelota mixteca's introduction (i.e. around the time of the Conquest and/or from Oaxaca), as well as material for which others have suggested that a handball game is depicted. Concretely, I will examine early Colonial chronicles, 16th century dictionaries of indigenous languages, Mixtec and Aztec codices, the Tepantitla murals from the archaeological site of Teotihuacan and the iconography of the site of Dainzú, Oaxaca. In the course of treating this material I will also take into account other examples of ballgame iconography, where applicable. Ultimately, the aim of this discussion is to determine whether any pre-Columbian game can be identified that might be considered pelota mixteca's precursor.

16th century Spanish sources

Many 16th-century missionaries that wrote chronicles on life in late pre-colonial and early colonial Mexico describe a selection of games that the indigenous population played. Among these, two games are consistently mentioned as the most important ones: *patolli* and *ulamalizatli/ollama* (e.g. Durán (1967[1570]), Sahagún (1977[1569]), Torquemada (1975-1983 [1615], Motolinia (1971[1858]; see de la Garza and Izquierdo 1980, and Taladoire 1981 for an excellent treatment of 16th-century sources on *ollama*). Apparently, these were the games that were played most at the time and that were considered most interesting by the Spaniards. In all the chronicles, *ulamaliztli* is the only ballgame that is described. The only handball game that is mentioned in all these sources is the Spanish *pelota a mano* which, as we have seen, is used as an analogy to explain the way *ulamaliztli* is played. There is, therefore, no indication of the existence of any indigenous handball game in the 16th-century descriptive sources.

While the descriptions of games do not make mention of any type of handball game, the illustrations that accompany some of these works do show indigenous players of *ullamaliztli* who hold rubber balls in their hands. These pictures are more accurately described as depicting the start of a game of *ullamaliztli/ollama*, which is effectuated by a player throwing the ball towards his opponent. Not only are these actions depicted inside a pre-Columbian I-shaped ball court, Durán, in the text which accompanies this illustration, clearly mentions that he is depicting a game of *ollama*. The confusion surrounding these images might have arisen from the fact that they were drawn in European style, by artists who were quite probably familiar with the Spanish handball game. As a result, the drawings are somewhat reminiscent of similar depictions of the initial service in European handball games (see for example Figs. 21 and 22).

Apart from the 16th century descriptive sources, early colonial dictionaries of indigenous languages provide a wealth of information on life in Mexico in the 16th century. An analysis of the wealth of terms used for balls, ballgames and ballgame related acts can shed more light on the types of games that were played. Below, I will examine the *Vocabulario en lengua çapoteca* by fray Juan de Córdova (1942 [1578]), the *Vocabulario en Lengua Mixteca* by fray Fransisco de Alvarado (1962 [1593]), the *Bocabulario en Lengua de Mechuacan* by fray Maturino Gilberti (1962 [1559]), and the *Vocabulario en Lengua Mexicana y Castellana* by fray Alonso de Molina (1945 [1571]). I will first treat the dictionaries separately, followed by a synthesis of what these dictionaries tell us about the possible existence of an indigenous Mesoamerican handball game.

Nahuatl, Molina

In his vocabulary of 16th-century Nahuatl, Molina (1944 [1571]) lists several terms for different types of ballgames. Since the dictionary is both Spanish-Nahuatl and Nahuatl-Spanish, there are some differences in orthography – for example, *ullama* vs. *ollama* or *netetemiuiliztli* vs. *netetemilhuiliztli*. Taking into account these different spellings, three different types of games are mentioned:

ollama	jugar a la pelota con las nalgas
ollamaliztli	juego de pelota desta manera
nomatotopeuiliztli	juego de pelota con la mano
neteteminiliztli	juego de pelota con la rodilla

As for types of balls, Molina (1944 [1571]) mentions:

Tapayolli, matotopetli	pelota como quiera
Ulli, ullamaloni	pelota para jugar al batey
Olli	cierta goma de arboles medicinal, deque hazen pelotas para jugar con las nalgas
Tlayhyyotentli tapayolli	pelota de viento
tlayhiotemaliztli	el acto de hinchar o héchiz de viento de bota o la pelota de viento

In this dictionary we see entries for three different types of ballgames: a game played with the hips, a game played with the hands, and a game played with the knees. The hipball game is named after the material used for the ball and the kneeball game is clearly named after the Nahuatl term for knee, *tetepontli* (Simeon 1885). The handball game, according to Simeon (1885:262), is formed of the roots *maitl* – for hand – and *totopetli* – for ball. However, Molina only lists *matotopetli*, not *totopetli*, for ball, in which case the *ma-* prefix might not refer to hand. Just from the entries for the games we cannot deduce if they are of Spanish or Mesoamerican origin. What is clear from the entry *olli* is that the use of rubber for balls only pertains to the hipball game. Other balls are referred to as *tapayolli*, or *matotopetli*. It should be noted that *tapayolli* refers to round things in general, as is clear from Molina's entry for *Repollo de Berça.Coles* (cabbage), which is also translated as *tapayolli*. Additionally, we see that balls of the Spanish type, which were often blown-up animal organs called *pelota de viento* in Spanish, are simply referred to as round things (*tapayolli*) that have been filled with air/blown-up, (*tlayhyyotentli*), an apt description. While there is no certainty about whether these balls were used in Mesoamerica before the conquest, the lack of a specific word for this type

of ball, as opposed to balls made of other materials, might indicate that this description only applied to, newly discovered, Spanish balls.

Zapotec, Córdova

The Zapotec dictionary by Córdova (1942 [1578]) lists the following terms that are related to ballgames:

Jugar ala bola o bolos	*Tochijcuàya, tochijcuèa, tochijco, tochijcaya*
Jugar ala pelota de los yndios con las nalgas	*Tiquija làchi, cotija, quiquijaya*
Jugar a la pelota nuestra con la mano	*Tigàapayapitìpi, pelòlo, cotàapaya*
Pelota de las nuestras jugar	*Vide palmada. Tigàpaya, cotàpa*
Pelota de los Indios jugar	*Tiquija yalàchi, cotija*
Batey, juego de pelota de los yndios el lugar	*Quèye, quìya*
Botar pelota	*Tiquijaláche, cotija*.|. *nalòlo, ca, tigápay, cotàpa*
Rechazar pelota o lo que me arrojan	*Tiquija, cotija, ca, ticèquija, cocequija*

For the different balls, Córdova mentions:

Bola o pelota de viento	*Láchipee, pitipipee*
Bala de viento o bola	*Pellòlopee ti guijni*.|.*làchi*, *que es pelota de Indios*.|. *petipepij*
Pelota como quiera	*Pitipi, pellòlo, pallòlo, natòbi*
Pelota antigua de los Indios para su juego	*Làchi*
Pelota de las nuestras para jugar	*Pitipi*

As in the case of Molina, here we see three different types of games. However, the first one that is mentioned – jugar ala bola o bolos – refers to bowling, rather than a ballgame in our sense of the word. Apart from bowling, Córdova mentions a hipball game played by the indigenous population and contrasts this with a handball game, which he describes as 'our game' or a 'ballgame like we play it'. This clearly indicates a European origin for this handball game. Córdova translates this European game as *tigàpaya, cotàpa*. It should be noted that *tigàpaya* also translates as *amasa tortillas de mayz hazerlas como hazen las indias* and that to hit something with the hips (*nalguear, dar nalgadas*) is translated as *tigàpaya xigòhueni, cotàpa xigòyeni* (*xigòhueni* is hip), indicating that *tigàapayapitipi*, the name of the European handball game, might simply have been translated as 'to hit a ball (with the hand)', as also implied by the Córdova's addition of *vide palmada*. Likewise, the

term used for the indigenous hipball game, *tiquija làchi*, seems to be a combination of the words for 'to hit' or 'to contest' *tiquija/cotija* and *làchi*, the word for the rubber ball of Mesoamerican origin. As in Molina's dictionary, in Zapotec there is a difference in the terms used for the balls for the hipball game and the handball game. These differences probably result from the fact that the hipball game was played with a rubber ball, while the handball game was played with the use of a different type of ball, the *pelota de viento* that is also mentioned by Córdova. This *bola o pelota de viento*, is translated as *láchipee* or *pitipipee*. In the dictionaries of Molina (see above) and Gilberti (see below) we also find the entry 'pelota de viento', clearly referring to a (probably European) ball that was inflated. In both these cases the term used (*tapayolli* for Nahuatl, *apantzequa* for Tarascan) is different from the one used to describe the rubber ball used for the hipball game. In Zapotec, however, we find the entry *láchipee*, which combines the word *làchi*, used by Córdova as a term for the rubber ball, and *pee*, which means wind. It seems quite unlikely that a rubber ball could be inflated and how this term relates to *pitipipee*, which incorporates the term *pitipi* that Córdova uses for Spanish balls, is unclear. The entry for *bala de viento o bola* includes the term *petipepij*, which also is a literal translation of *pelota de viento* (*pij* is wind).

In the 20th century, the term *làchi* was still in use. A description of ballgames played by Zapotecs during the first half of the 20th century in Juchitán, in the south of the state of Oaxaca (Mendieta 1949) describes two different ballgames that were played during the 1940s. These games were played either with a rubber ball, or a ball made of rags of cloth. The rubber ball is called *talaatchi*, while the ball made of rags is called *tapuuh*. While the term *tapuuh* is absent from the 16th century dictionary, the term *talaatchi* is derived from the 16th century *lachi* for rubber ball. The word *pitipi* is also absent from Mendieta's work, an indication of the enduring importance and status of rubber as a material.

Mixtec, Alvarado

The *Vocabulario en lengua Mixteca* by fray Francisco de Alvarado (1962 [1593]) lists:

yocotondi ñama	jugar a la pelota de los yndios
yocatundi ñama	jugar a la pelota como dizen de boleo
yochihi nduundi	jugar a los bolos

Alvarado (1962[1593]) mentions only generic term for balls, not giving any more defining features:

tiñama, tinduu, ñama	pelota

The information in the Mixtec dictionary is quite scant. Again, there is a mention of a bowling game, in addition to a term for the indigenous hipball game, and a third game referred to as *como dizen de boleo*. Considering that *pelota mixteca* is, to this day, sometimes referred to as *bolear* and that the term *volea* (which can also be spelled *voleo, bolea, boleo,* or *voleia* according to Garcia and Llopis [1991]) is a main form of play in Valencian *llargues*, it seems probable that this is a reference to the game that the Spaniards brought with them. At first glance, it might seem odd that the terms for the indigenous *ollama* game, and an imported Spanish pastime would be the same, but since *yocotondi ñama* translates literally as "I play ball" (M. Jansen personal communication, 2008), this equivalence of terms is not surprising.

As for balls, there is only a general entry which does not clearly differentiate between balls used for indigenous games or for Spanish games. This general entry does include the terms *ñama* and *tindua*, which imply that different words for balls – or round objects – may have been in use.

Tarascan, Gilberti

Finally, the *Bocabulario en lengua de Mechuacán* by fray Maturino Gilberti (Gilberti 1962 [1559]), lists:

Taranduni	jugar a la pelota con las nalgas
Apantzeti	jugar a la pelota con la mano
Taranduqua hurincxtaqua	juego de pelota con la rodilla
Taranduquaro querehtaro	Batei, juego de pelota con las nalgas
Querehta	lugar donde juegan a la pelota

For balls, we find:

Taranduqua	pelota para jugar al batey
Xepandequa, apantzequa	pelota como quiera
Apantzequa	pelota
Apantzequa tariata hatzinacata	pelota de viento
Tariata, tariyata	viento
Tariyatahatirani	hinchar soplando
Tariyata hatziraqua	hinchamiento assi

In this dictionary, we see the same games that we have seen before in the other languages: a game played with the knees, a game played with the hips, and a game played with the hands. We also see the same recurring difference between balls used for the hipball game and the balls used for the

handball game. In Tarascan, like in Nahuatl, the name for the hipball game seems to be derived from the ball that is used, or possibly even from the material. Sadly, no translation for rubber is given in Gilberti's dictionary. Also like in Nahuatl, the term for *pelota de viento*, the Spanish kind of ball, is simply a description of a ball filled with air. Again, the lack of a specific word might be an indication that such balls did not exist in Mesoamerica before the Conquest.

Synthesis

On the basis of these four dictionaries we can distinguish at least three main types of games that were played with balls, and that were known throughout central and southern Mexico in the 16th century.

1. The well-known hipball game of *ollama/ullamaliztli* in Aztec, *tiquija làchi, cotija* or *quiquijaya* in Zapotec, *yocatundi ñama* (?) in Mixtec, and *taranduni* in Tarascan.
2. A ballgame played with the hand called *nomatotopeuiliztli* in Aztec, *Tigàapayapitìpi, pelòlo,* or *cotàapaya* in Zapotec, and *apantzeni* in Tarascan.
3. A ballgame played using the knees, called *netetemininiliztli* in Aztec, and *taranduqua hurincxtaqua* in Tarascan.

While we cannot say anything about the specifics of these games, we can determine certain characteristics on the basis of these dictionaries. Firstly, looking more closely at the terms themselves, it is clear that the hip-ballgame and the hand-ballgame are both named after the type of ball that is used (*ulli* vs. *matotopetli*, *làchi* vs. *petipi*, and *taranduqua* vs. *apantzequa*). Among the Aztecs, Zapotecs, and Tarascans the ball used for the hipball game (*ulli, lachi, taranduqua*) clearly had a special status and had a linguistically unrelated name. In Nahuatl, we know that this name was derived from the material of which the ball was made. In Zapotec and Tarascan we cannot be sure on the basis of these dictionaries, but it seems possible that the rubber balls received their name in a similar way.

As mentioned before, Stern (1949:72) has argued that contemporary handball games played in Mexico are of non-Mesoamerican origin because they lack the root *ulli* in the Nahuatl terms given by Molina. While I do not fully agree with this reasoning, because I do not think there is any evidence that all pre-Columbian Mesoamerican ballgames were played with rubber balls, I do think that it is probable that the hipball game was the most important game that was played with a rubber ball. Other games may have been played with a ball made of different materials. I base this idea mainly on the fact that the entry for *olli* in the Molina's Nahuatl dictionary ("*olli* – cierta goma de arboles medicinal, deque hazen pelotas para jugar con las nalgas") explicitly states that rubber was only used for the manufacture of balls for the hip-ballgame. Additionally, the fact that the names for the

other games in Nahuatl do not contain the root *ulli* or *olli*, and the fact that, as we have seen, this difference is a recurrent aspect in 16th century Mesoamerican languages seem to imply that rubber was specifically used for the hipball game. Furthermore, rubber was not readily available in all parts of Mexico and had a special, ritual meaning and function, making it unsuitable for games that, in all probability, did not have the same ritual significance as the hipball game. According to M. S. Edmundson (1967:198), based on a survey of the 16th century chronicles and dictionaries, "a variety of balls was used in Middle America: the leaf or rag or cornhusk ball in volleying games and sometimes in hockey (*totopetli*), wooden pucks, marbles or bowling balls (*momotla*), a hide or hair ball for throwing and catching games (*telolotl*), the juggling ball of wood, rubber, stone or clay (*tapayolli*), and the rubber balls in handball and hip-ball games (*olli*)."

Interestingly, while the hipball game and the handball game are differentiated in all dictionaries by the type of ball that is used, the ballgame played with the knees (*neteteminiliztli*, and *taranduqua hurincxtaqua*), seems, in both Aztec and Tarascan, to be named after the way of playing, since *tetepontli* is Nahuatl for knee (Simeon 1885), and *hurinxqua* is Tarascan for knee (Gilberti 1962[1559]). The addition of *taranduqua* in Tarascan might indicate that a rubber ball was used for this game is as well. In this context, it is worthwhile to note that Diego Durán (1967[1570]) in his description of *ollama* mentions that the ball is primarily hit with the hips, but that sometimes the use of the knees is also allowed. If rubber balls were indeed used for the kneeball game, it could mean that rubber was not only used for ritual ballgames, or that the kneeball game also had a ritual component.

In conclusion, it is clear that terms describing a ballgame played with the hands were in use in sixteenth century Mexico. This ballgame is referred to by Córdova as 'our (Spanish) handball game' and by Alvarado as 'the ballgame called *boleo*', clearly indicating a European origin at least for the Zapotec and Mixtec terms. In Nahuatl and Tarascan, there is no explicit mention of the origin of the game, but it is clear that a different type of ball is used for this game than for the ballgames of Mesoamerican origin. Together with the lack of descriptions of an indigenous handball game in the sixteenth-century chronicles, this seems to indicate that any handball game that was played in sixteenth-century Mexico was of European origin.

Pre-Columbian indigenous codices

Above we have seen that no specific term is mentioned for an indigenous handball game in Alvarado's dictionary of sixteenth-century Mixtec. However, this is of course a Spanish colonial source, not an indigenous one. In contrast, pre-Colonial and early Colonial pictographic codices present us with an indigenous vision on life in Mexico around the time of the Spanish conquest. If

any type of handball game is depicted in these documents, this would be indisputable evidence of the existence of a pre-Columbian Mesoamerican handball game.

Since the main aim of this chapter is to determine whether any form of indigenous handball can be identified in pre-Colonial sources, my treatment of these codices will be concise and will focus, rather superficially, on the formal aspects of ballgames that are represented, rather than on their context.

Broadly speaking, the ballgame-related iconography in the codices can be divided into three categories. The first, and by far the largest, category is the representation of I-shaped ball courts as part of toponyms. Examples of this are the infixing of ball courts into mountains or hills, or the combination of ball courts with other iconographical elements, such as bird or fire, to form place names like “Hill of the Ball court of the Eagle” (Fig. 23). This type of iconography is found in the majority of the extant pre-Columbian codices. Important to note is that all the ball courts that are pictured are of the I-shaped variant (which is associated with the hipball game).

The second, rarer, type of ballgame-related iconography is the representation of an I-shaped ball court in the personal name of characters appearing in the codices. This type of iconography functions in the same way as the toponyms, although this category is concerned with the naming of persons, rather than places. This type of iconography only seems to appear in Codex Selden/Añute. Again, we only have representations of I-shaped ball courts, related to the hip-ballgame.

The third, rarest but also most interesting, category of ballgame-related iconography is the depiction of actions within ball courts (Fig. 24). These actions portrayed within the ball court range from the actual playing of a ballgame (Codex Bodley/Ñuu Tnoo 10), to a meeting of two persons (Codex Nuttal/Tonindeye 80r.), or just the representation of one person sitting inside a ball court (Codex Nuttal/Tonindeye 45r.). Apart from these, apparently, more profane contexts in which actions in the ball court appear, in the Codex Borgia/Yoalli Ehecatl (21r., 42r, a.o.) we see the depiction of ritual/ceremonial actions. In all of these instances, I-shaped ball courts are portrayed, implying a connection with the hip-ballgame. Additionally, in one of the Codex Nuttall/Tonindeye examples, a yugo is clearly brought to the main protagonists by an assistant.

While it would be interesting to study the role that the ball court and the ballgame play in these codices in more detail, the aim of this chapter restricts a more in-depth analysis at this time. Therefore, I will limit myself to noting that in all the pre-Columbian Mixtec and Aztec codices only scenes related to the hip-ballgame are depicted. This is not only true for the actual depictions of the game being played – like in Codex Bodley 10 and Codex Borgia 35r. – but also for the representations of I-shaped ball courts and ball court paraphernalia (like yugos) that all seem to indicate that at the

time of the Conquest the hip-ballgame was the only ballgame with ritual importance in Central Mexico and the Mixteca. In any case, a handball game is not depicted in any of these codices.

Tepantitla

The Tepantitla compound is a residential complex located in the ancient metropolis of Teotihuacan. As in other residential complexes of Teotihuacan, the inner walls of the houses at Tepantitla are fully adorned with mural paintings. Most elaborate among these mural paintings is the so-called Tlalocan Complex, located in the main building of the Tepantitla compound. The Tlalocan Complex received its name from its original analysis by Alfonso Caso (1942), who claimed that the main mural painting of the Tepantitla Complex depicted what the Aztecs called Tlalocan, the paradise of Tlaloc, "the afterworld of those who died through the agency of the water god" (Pasztory 1976:104). Caso based this interpretation mainly on a comparison with the different types of paradises that existed for the Aztecs, as described by the Spanish chronicler Torquemada (*ibid*.:104). This interpretation was first challenged by Esther Pasztory (1976) who suggested that the 'Tlalocan complex' depicts a "composite bisexual or female deity and […] a series of rituals apparently related to its cult" (*ibid.*:252). Most recently, Maria Teresa Uriarte (1996, 2006) has proposed that the main topic of the Tlalocan complex is the representation of the ballgame as a central theme in the cult of the rain god Tlaloc. While there is no room here to present a more profound analysis of the Tlalocan complex murals, it is clear that different types of ballgames are omnipresent in the murals of Tepantitla. According to Uriarte (1996: 258-259) eight ballgames can be discerned in the Tlalocan Complex murals.

1. A game using a stick, hitting the ball above the head.
2. A game using a stick, hitting the ball on the ground.
3. A hip-ballgame, using a *yugo*.
4. A football game.
5. A hip-ballgame played inside a formal court, probably representing *ulama*.
6. A hip-ballgame played inside a formal court with specific markers.
7. A game using a stick and movable markers.
8. A ballgame played on a stepped court.

Though I have my doubts about certain parts of Uriarte's analysis, I will limit my treatment of Tepantitla to a few notes on the specificities of some of these ballgames, and their relation to modern-day ballgames played in Mexico today.

Handball games at Tepantitla

Clearly, for my purposes, one of the most noteworthy aspects of the Tepantitla iconography is that, even though a variety of ballgames is represented in these murals, a handball game is not one of them (in contrast to what Taladoire [2003:340] claims). It should be noted that there is no certainty about whether the Tepantitla murals depict games that were played in Teotihuacan, or whether they represent games that Teotihuacanos knew were played all over Mesoamerica. If the first is the case, we can only assume that the hand-ballgame was not played at Teotihuacan proper. If the latter is the case, it seems highly doubtful that a type of hand-ballgame was played in Classic period Mesoamerica, at least around the time of the construction of the Tepantitla complex (ca. 500-600 A.D.).

Stick-ballgames and pelota tarasca

The different types of stick-ball, which Uriarte has termed game 1 and 2, have been related by Eric Taladoire (2001:113) to the modern-day game of pelota tarasca, since the few ethnographic descriptions that have been made of this game state that pelota tarasca is played with the use of a stick (Cortes Ruiz et al. 1986; Turok 2000). Pelota tarasca is played in the states of Guerrero and Michoacán, and in Mexico City. This game has not received as much attention from anthropologists and archaeologists as have Ulama and Pelota mixteca. As such, detailed studies by anthropologists are lacking. As a consequence, archaeologists who have never actually seen the game being played, construct theories on the basis of a very limited corpus of information about the sport (as has also been the case with Pelota mixteca). However, the 'sticks' that are actually used for Pelota Tarasca are small wooden sticks of about 15 cm. in length and about 2-3 cm. in diameter (Chaves Peralta n.d.), in no way resembling the sticks that are shown on the Tepantitla murals. Looking more closely at the rules of pelota tarasca (Chavez Peralta n.d.), it is clear that pelota tarasca is also a sport of European origin: the court is divided up into the *zona de saque* and *zona de resto*, the playing field has about the same dimensions as the Pelota mixteca courts (100 x 13 meters), the *raya* rule exists, the person in charge of the field is called *coime*, and the score is counted 15-30-40-juego. Pelota tarasca, then, is very similar to pelota mixteca and seems to be another local variant of the European Medieval handball game, unrelated to the Teotihuacan stick-ballgame.

Tepantitla Football and Talaatchi

The fourth game that Uriarte (1996:258) sees in the Tepantitla murals is one in which a player seems to kick the ball with his foot. According to Uriarte (1996:227) this is a unique type of game that was not played at the time of the Spanish Conquest, nor is it played at present. In chapter two, I mentioned games that were played by the Zapotecs from Juchitán during the 1940s: *talaatchi*, *guiipi*

and *tapuuh* (Mendieta 1949). These games could be played with the use of a rubber ball or of a ball made of rags. In both games, the players had to keep the ball in the air, making sure that it did not hit the ground. This was achieved by bouncing the ball on the feet, knees, elbows, head or shoulders. The games were differentiated by whether they were played competitively or not. *Guiipi* was played competitively between two individuals, who always made a bet on the outcome beforehand. The aim was to keep the ball in the air for as long as possible, with as many bounces as possible. Some expert players are said to have reached scores of more than 1500 (*ibid.*). *Tapuuh*, on the other hand, was a non-competitive game in which up to ten or more people participated, hitting or kicking the ball from one person to the other, trying to keep the ball from touching the ground. Without wanting to over-interpret the iconography – in the end, all we see is a person kicking a ball – it could be possible that the game depicted in the Tepantitla murals is in some way similar to those described by Mendieta (1949).

Dainzú[14]

Introduction

The archaeological remains most associated with Pelota mixteca are undoubtedly those of Dainzú and surroundings. While the site was inhabited almost continuously from the Formative to the Postclassic, Dainzú, located in the Central Valley of the state of Oaxaca, had its apogee in the Terminal Formative period (200 BC – 200 AD)[15] with the construction of a large civic-ceremonial center (Bernal and Oliveros 1988: 51-52; Bernal and Seuffert 1979; Orr 2003: 73-75; Urcid 2014). This ceremonial center was constructed on the sides of the Cerro Dainzú, a hill located about 35 kilometers south of the modern city of Oaxaca, and the archaeological site of Monte Alban. Excavations at the site were started by Mexican archaeologist Ignacio Bernal in 1966, after the discovery of an incised stone during a survey (Bernal and Seuffert 1979: 11; Orr 2003: 74). At its heyday, the site contained sixteen monumental buildings, and had an estimated population of a little under 1,000 inhabitants (Urcid 2014:3). Even though the site has a 'traditional' I-shaped ball court for the hip-ballgame, dating to the much later Late Classic (around 900 AD, Monte Alban IV) period (Bernal and Oliveros 1988:23) this is not my main point of interest for the site of Dainzú. My focal

[14] An earlier version of this chapter was published as Berger (2010).

[15] While it is customary in Oaxacan archaeology to use Monte Alban chronology, in which the Dainzú reliefs would fall in the late Monte Alban I and Monte Alban II periods, for comparative purposes, I prefer to use the Formative-Classic-Post Classic terminology.

point will be the large sculpted and incised stone slabs that Bernal and his co-workers found at the site, surrounding the so-called Complex A (Fig. 25).

Complex A is an L-shaped building, consisting of three platforms that reach a total height of 7.6 m. (Taladoire 2003:323). The lowest of these three platforms is 54 meters wide and 42 meters deep, the south side of which was covered by incised slabs depicting human figures. On the north side of the building, only one incised slab was found (Bernal and Seuffert 1979:12). Bernal's excavations uncovered a total of forty-one stones. While the dating of these slabs, or reliefs, was complicated by the lack of datable context, they have generally been ascribed to the first and second periods of construction of Dainzú, around 300 – 100 BCE (Bernal and Oliveros 1988: 50). Since the slabs were placed in the wall in two rows, one on top of the other, only the lower row, consisting of twenty slabs, was found *in situ* (*ibid.*: 12). However, according to Orr, these twenty slabs also show evidence of reuse, indicating that "they are not located in their original architectural context" (2003:75; see also Urcid 2014: note 3). The rest of the slabs were found on the ground surrounding the structure, having either fallen out of the upper row, or possibly never having been placed in the wall at all (Bernal and Seuffert 1979:12). Originally, according to Bernal (1973:14), there must have been about fifty slabs surrounding Complex A.

Bernal divided the forty-one slabs into three groups: A, B, and C. The first group (A) consists of thirty-three relief carvings that depict human figures holding a ball. They have been identified by Bernal as a group of ballplayers. The second group (B) contains four slabs that display seated human figures with human or animal heads, which Bernal saw as Gods of the Game. It is important to note that none of the slabs of group B were found *in situ* (Urcid 2014:fig. 4). The third, and last, group (C) represents a rest category, and consists of four remaining slabs that Bernal could not classify (*ibid*:15). Two of these stones represent hieroglyphs, one represents a skull, and the last is unintelligible. Since group A is the only of the three groups to actually show individuals identified as ballplayers, I will concentrate my analysis on this group of reliefs, and the related petroglyphs found at the summit of Cerro Dainzú, which we will discuss later.

Group A consists of thirty-three stones that depict human figures. Except for slab 23, which depicts two figures, all the slabs depict one human figure in a contorted, and sometimes even unnatural, position. According to Bernal these postures, "portray the gestures and movements typical of the game" (1973:17). All the figures wear the same basic attire: a helmet with a visor, and a type of short pants that reach to the knees (Fig. 26). They all seem to wear a type of footwear, since the toes of none of the individuals are shown, but what kind of footwear this was remains unclear. All the figures have their arms protected by bands wound around the lower arm and tied at the elbow (*ibid*:15). A few of the figures seem to be wearing some kind of cape that flows down to around the

knees. Additionally, some of the figures (13, 19, 21, 23, 41, and 43; for all of the figures mentioned here, see the appendix of Bernal and Seuffert 1979) wear protective padding around the knees. Nineteen of the *visor helmets* are decorated with what seems to be a jaguar ear, while on others the motif can either no longer be identified, or the helmet is decorated with feathers or other adornments. Some of these adornments have reminded researchers of the 'long teeth' associated typically with the Zapotec Rain-Lightning deity Cociyo (Orr 2003:85), while others have seen this motif as an allusion to maize (Urcid 2014). Except for stone 1 and 3, all of the figures are portrayed in right profile view, and none are depicted in direct relation to the ground. Most of the figures appear to be falling backward or reclining (i.e. 4, 7, 8/9, 11, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 26, 31, 32, 34, 39, 41, 42; Fig. 27), while others seem to be kneeling, or possibly falling forward (3, 13, 14, 15, 36, 47; Fig. 28 ORIGINEEL Fig 30).

Possibly the most interesting slab of group A is stone 1 (Fig. 29), which functions as the right corner stone of the façade of the building. Since the figure on stone 1 is depicted in left profile, all the other figures seem to be facing him. The figure in stone 1 appears to be a man, who is more elaborately dressed than the rest of the figures on the wall, sporting an elaborate headdress on top of his helmet, some type of unidentifiable garment or pectoral, and what seem to be feathers hanging from his belt. He seems to be holding a ball of the same type as the other figures in his left hand, while in his right hand he holds an object that is hard to identify because of the erosion to the stone. Bernal (1973:17; 1979:17) has identified this object as some kind of sword or knife, on the basis of a comparison to stone 5 at Cerro Dainzú (Fig. 30), the hilltop above Complex A which I will treat later on. As mentioned before, the figure on stone 1 is one of only two of the group A figures that is not depicted as floating in space. He seems to be standing on some kind of platform, connected to a hieroglyph, the meaning of which is unknown. According to Orr (2003:83) this difference in posture signifies the defeat of the falling or reclining figures at the hand of the standing figures. Additionally, she believes that the blades imply that the falling figures are to be sacrificed as a result of their loss in a particular ballgame. We will return to these points later on. Next to the elaborately dressed figure on stone 1 is a series of curvilinear lines, which have not been identified definitively.

Apart from the slabs recovered from Complex A, Bernal and his team found a large collection of petroglyphs, incised on natural rocks on Cerro Dainzú, the hill above Complex A. A large part of these petroglyphs depict helmets, detached from a body, identical to the helmets seen on the human figures on the slabs around Complex A. Bernal identified these helmets as human heads, separated from the body by a decapitation ritual, performed after the hypothesized ballgame. As a consequence, Bernal (1979:22) has termed this group the *tzompantli* group, after the Aztec wall of skulls, found sometimes in association with ball courts. This *tzompantli* group consists of thirty-eight

helmets or heads. Next to this *tzompantli* group, the main monument on the top of the hill is a large slab (stone 5) that Bernal has termed the 'Wall of Sacrifice' (Fig. 30). On this 'Wall of Sacrifice', we see a man very similar to the one depicted in stone 1 of the Complex A slabs. He sports an elaborate headdress on top of his helmet, has feathers hanging from his belt, holds a small ball in his right hand above his head and what is probably a knife, as Bernal calls it, a type of sword in his left hand. Additionally, he is depicted standing on top of a stepped platform that is decorated with what, according to Bernal (1973:17), is a jaguar head, possibly naming the location "Hill of the Jaguar". The man is holding a knife that is pointed towards a figure who is falling backwards, and who is dressed exactly like the figures from the Complex A slabs. This figure seems to be falling down the stepped platform that the other is standing on.
In summary, we have the following scenes:

1. The façade of Complex A shows several figures holding a type of ball and dressed in protective gear that all appear to be kneeling or falling. These figures all face one particular figure, who is more elaborately dressed, is the only one that is standing, and who points some kind of weapon in their direction. Possibly related to the falling figurines are seated personages, that are differently attired, and some of whom are wearing masks.
2. The hilltop of Cerro Dainzú, which was possibly originally connected to the lower lying Complex A by a ceremonial pathway, has depictions of several helmets identical to the ones worn by the figures on the Complex A slabs. These all seem to face the main scene, depicting a standing man, who looks very similar to the standing man in the Complex A group.

The first of these scenes has traditionally been termed the "Wall of the Ballplayers" (Bernal 1968, 1973; Bernal and Seuffert 1979; Orr 2003; Taladoire 2003). What are the reasons for this interpretation, and is this interpretation correct? Or are there any other possible interpretations for the carvings?

History of analysis

Ever since the first excavations at Dainzú in 1966, Bernal (1968, 1973, 1979) has argued that the figures depicted at Dainzú represent ballplayers. According to Bernal these figures represented ballplayers because "each of them carries a ball in one hand as identification, […] the protection of arms and knees and the mask reinforce this interpretation." (Bernal 1979: 16). While Bernal (1968) initially argued that these balls could have been made of stone or rubber, he later decided in favor of the interpretation of a rubber ball, since otherwise the ballgame would have had little attractive

value (Bernal and Seuffert 1979:27). Heather Orr (2003: 83), rejecting Bernal and Seuffert's analysis, has preferred to view the balls as some kind of stone balls or spheroids (see below). As noted above, the postures of the players, which according to Bernal (1979:17) "could result from an especially active sport" strengthened Bernal in his view that the figures represented ballplayers.

The main line of interpretation of the slabs has always been that of a ballgame. The nature of the game played at Dainzú, however, has been debated over time. Bernal (1968; Bernal and Seuffert 1979:26), Swezey (1972: 475), and Oliveros (1997:24) identified the game depicted at Dainzú with Pelota mixteca, considering the former to be a pre-Columbian variant of the latter, mostly based on the gloves used for Pelota mixteca (see also Borhegyi 1980). Swezey (1972:477), like Bernal (1968, 1973, 1979), convinced of the Olmec origin of the culture present at Dainzú, took this analogy even further by claiming that the gloves used in pelota mixteca were derived from the so-called *manoplas* or 'knuckledusters' found in the Olmec area. Urcid (2014:10) has not related the Dainzú reliefs to pelota mixteca but notes that the slabs might represent a game played with a small rubber ball that was thrown or hit with a glove around the hand. Heather Orr (2003), on the other hand, has preferred to see the figures at Dainzú as depicting a type of "institutionalized form of ritual combat" (*ibid*.:73) in which stone balls were thrown at or used to hit the opponent. Nonetheless, while Orr argues that the balls used in the Dainzú game or 'mock combat' were made of stone so that they could inflict as much damage as possible, she does refer to the combat or game as a ballgame and state that "the Dainzú game might be a Pre-Columbian variant of the *Juego de Pelota mixteca* played in the Oaxaca Valley today" (*ibid.*: 95). She does this on the basis of conversations with a pelota mixteca player from the Etla Valley, who argued that the Dainzú reliefs depicted *Pelota a Mano Fría* (see chapter 1). However, since pelota mixteca is not a combat sport and does not make use of stone balls, the relationship between Orr's hypothesized ritual combat and modern-day pelota mixteca is unclear.

Eric Taladoire (2003) follows Bernal and sees the Dainzú iconographic program as the depiction of a game similar to pelota mixteca. Taladoire argues that the Dainzú reliefs represent a pre-Hispanic ballgame that was played inside the so-called *palangana*-type ball courts. According to Taladoire, "[pelota mixteca] developed during the Late Preclassic and early Classic periods, when influences from Mexico were important in the Guatemalan highlands". In the Late Classic period, with the decline of Teotihuacan's, such influences lost their importance, and the *pelota mixteca* and related *palangana* courts disappeared from many regions, remaining in use only in central and northern Oaxaca" (Taladoire 2003:339). Taladoire suggests that the traditional hip-ballgame lost popularity during the Early and Middle Classic period, because this game was not played at Teotihuacan,

thereby implying some relation between pelota mixteca, Dainzú, and Teotihuacan. I will treat this argument in more detail later on.

In contrast to the authors mentioned above, who refer to the Dainzú game as a ballgame, others have denied the existence of a relationship between pelota mixteca and Dainzú. According to Nicholas Hellmuth (quoted in Taladoire 2003:326) the denial of the representation of a ballgame at Dainzú is based on three arguments: "the long chronological gap between pelota mixteca and the Dainzú reliefs", "the lack of any representation of a ballgame resembling that of Dainzú in the Mixtec codices", and "the lack of positive evidence of the Dainzú reliefs as representing a game, let alone a ballgame." Most recently, Karl Taube and Marc Zender (2009), in an impressive study of possible examples of Mesoamerican ritual boxing, have proposed that the Dainzú reliefs depict a form of boxing that was performed throughout pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. Taube and Zender illustrate many examples of 'boxing-related' imagery from Oaxaca and the Maya area, including murals from the Middle Classic tomb 5 of Cerro de la Campana (Miller 1996), some *danzante* type figures from Monte Alban (Orr 2001; Scott 1978), painted Classic Maya vases (Kerr 1989:13; Robicsek and Hales 1981:116), and figurines from the site of Lubaantun in Belize (Joyce 1933; Orr 2001:84; Taladoire 2003:326), among other things. Since this corpus of iconography is central to the identification of the game/combat/ritual depicted in the Dainzú slabs, I will treat it in somewhat more detail.

Iconographic context

One of the most notable aspects of the iconography of Dainzú is its apparent uniqueness. Iconographical depictions similar in style and subject matter have been found in the villages of Tlacochahuaya and Macuilxóchitl (Bernal and Seuffert 1979:fig. 52, 56). However, these villages both lie only a small distance from the site of Dainzú and these stones are found in the foundation or façade of houses. Hence, it is probable that these slabs were taken from the site of Dainzú and reused in the construction of the Colonial houses in Macuilxóchitl and Tlacochahuaya. Apart from the several carvings found in, on and under houses in Macuilxóchitl and Tlacochahuaya, one stone from Monte Albán is known, depicting a helmet identical to those represented at Dainzú (Orr 2003: fig. 6a). This monument, however, is so far unique in the whole corpus of Monte Alban iconography. The abovementioned monuments are the only ones that are related to Dainzú without any doubt. However, a considerable corpus of comparable iconography has been related to the Dainzú reliefs.

El Baúl Monument 27

One of the monuments that has most often been compared to the Dainzú corpus is monument 27, from the site of El Baúl in the Guatemala Highlands (Bernal 1968; Cohodas 1991:251; Parsons 1986;

Taladoire 2003:329). The monument depicts two figures: one standing upright, the other falling on his back at the feet of the standing individual (Fig. 31). Both seem to wear attire that looks similar to the figures of Dainzú - gloves, short pants and helmets. They also hold balls of the same size of those at Dainzú. The helmets are different from the visored helmets of Dainzú, but seem to represent either a jaguar, opossum (Taladoire 2003:329), or monkey head. As mentioned before, some of the helmets of the Dainzú figures have an element that resembles a jaguar's ear at the back. The similarity in attire between this monument and the reliefs of Dainzú – especially the 'sacrifice scene' from Cerro Dainzú – has led many researchers to believe that El Baúl monument 27 and the Dainzú reliefs both depict a type of handball game, played in both Guatemala and Oaxaca (e.g. Taladoire 2003).

While I acknowledge that the gloves, balls, and overall attire of the figures on the El Baúl monument are reminiscent of the Dainzú complex, I do not agree with this particular interpretation on several grounds. First, there is a large temporal and geographic distance between monument 27 and the Dainzú corpus. The first is a Late Classic (600 – 900 A.D.) monument from the Guatemalan coastal Pacific region, while the latter is a Late Formative (ca. 100 BC – 100 A.D.) monument from the Valley of Oaxaca. Second, and more significantly, the Cotzumalhuapa region – of which the site of El Baúl forms a central place - has a well-established tradition of the classic Mesoamerican hip-ballgame, including I-shaped ball courts, and the ceremonial stone yoke-hacha-palma complex at the time of construction of El Baúl Monument 27 (Parsons 1991:205). The site of El Baúl itself has an I-shaped ball court for the hip-ballgame (Parsons 1991:202). In this context, it seems improbable that an alternative tradition of ritual handball games would be present at the site during the same time period (see Chinchilla Mazariegos 2009). Lastly, on a more detailed note, the figures of monument 27 both seem to hold two balls in their hands, in contrast to the Dainzú figures, who hold one ball.

Lubaantún ceramic figurines

Marvin Cohodas (1991:251), following Bernal (1973:19) has grouped together the Dainzú reliefs, El Baúl monument 27, and ceramic figurines from the site of Lubaantún in modern-day Belize, arguing that they represent a type of handball game. While the connection between El Baúl and Dainzú is not surprising, in the context of a ballgame the inclusion of the Lubaantún figurines (Joyce 1933: plate 7, 8; Fig. 32) is more problematic. While these figures do wear helmets and gloves, they seem to have absolutely no association with balls, or a ballgame. Rather, these figurines are very reminiscent of the boxers that we encounter on a Late Classic Maya vase(Fig. 33), sporting the same kind of helmet and a glove that looks very similar those worn by Classic Maya boxers (see Taube and Zender 2009).

Tomb 5 of Cerro de la Campana

Both Heather Orr (2003:78-79) and Eric Taladoire (2003:329), while disagreeing on their interpretation of the nature of the game/ritual depicted at Dainzú, have proposed that mural paintings from Tomb 5 of Cerro de la Campana depict the same kind of ritual/game as that of Dainzú. The site of Cerro de la Campana is located in the Etla valley, some 30 kilometers northwest of the city of Oaxaca, and dates to the Classic period (around 700 A.D.; Miller 1996: 164; Orr 2003:78). The most striking element of the attire of the figures depicted in these murals, when comparing them to the reliefs at Dainzú, are the visored helmets that are worn by many figures in the procession. Apart from the helmets, the figures in the Tomb 5 murals hold objects that have been described as *manoplas* (Taladoire 2003:329), or balls (Orr 2003:95). They also wear capes or robes, which are decorated with different motifs. According to Taladoire (2003:329) "the presence of both the helmets and the *manopla*, instead of a glove, allows one to regard them as ballplayers." According to Orr (2003:79, following Miller 1996) the murals of Tomb 5 depict "ceremonially dressed handball players parading in a (funerary?) procession." Personally, I doubt both of these interpretations.

A first objection concerns the identification of the *manoplas*. While in Miller's (1996) drawings, to which both Orr and Taladoire refer, the objects held indeed look like balls or *manoplas*, photographs of the murals (De la Fuente 2008), clearly show that the members of the procession are holding oversized beans[16]. Obviously, the lack of a representation of a *manopla* is problematic when attempting to relate these figures to Dainzú. Be this as it may, even if the objects that the individuals in the murals of Tomb 5 of Cerro de la Campana are holding would have represented some kind of *manoplas*, it is clear that these objects are absent from the Dainzú corpus. Heather Orr (2005:95) has tried to account for this absence by suggesting "a substitution … in handball iconography between manoplas and (stone) balls, that indicates a link between mock combats using "knuckledusters" and those which employed hand-sized balls." This way, Orr creates a link between the murals of Cerro de la Campana and the imagery of several Late Classic Maya vases representing boxers participating in a ritual fight (Robiscek and Hales 1981:116; Kerr 1989:19 [K500]; Taube and Zender 2009). According to Orr, the boxers from Maya vases K500 and K700 (the identification numbers from the Kerr archive at www.famsi.org) are related in "formal posturing" (Orr 2003:84), and "by the evidence of human sacrifice, processions, and one-on-one confrontations involving implements intended to cause physical injury" (*ibid.*:84). Additionally, both "share the use of protective helmets" (*ibid.*: 84).

[16] I thank Dr. Alexander Geurds for drawing my attention to this aspect of the murals.

Regardless of whether Orr is correct in identifying a relationship between the Cerro de la Campana murals and the Maya vases K500 and K700 – and I think she might well be – it seems to me that this relationship does not prove any link between the Cerro de la Campana murals and the reliefs of Dainzú. Rather, I would ask: does this comparison place whatever is depicted at Dainzú apart from the presumed combat rituals depicted at Cerro de la Campana and on the Maya vases? I argue this especially in light of the iconography of a Late Classic Maya vase, identified as K8545 in the Kerr database (Fig. 34). Since this vase has no known archaeological context whatsoever, its place of origin and date of manufacture are unknown. The depictions on K8545 are much more similar to the Cerro de la Campana murals. Four of the figures wear helmets, not of the characteristic visored type, but helmets nonetheless. They also hold something in their hands that looks like the beans or *manoplas* from Cerro de la Campana, are richly attired and adorned with feathers, and are walking in a procession or dancing. They are accompanied by two figures who wear different attire, most probably musicians (Taube and Zender 2009:167). Like in the Cerro de la Campana murals, no actual fight, combat, or ballgame is depicted in this scene. The similarities between this scene, coming from the Maya area, and the Cerro de la Campana scene, from the state of Oaxaca, are undeniable, but we cannot determine the direction of influence. Contacts between Oaxaca and the Maya area were relatively intensive during the Middle and Late Classic periods (Whitecotton 1977:57). Monte Albán phase IIIb (500-700) is even largely distinguished from Monte Albán phase IV (700-1100), not on the basis of significant stylistic differences, but on the fact that Monte Albán IIIb deposits contain significant amounts of Maya pottery sherds (Marcus and Flannery 1996:193, 224). The contact between these two regions could have led to the spread of similar ceremonies or rituals.

If we accept that the Dainzú reliefs do not depict the same game or ritual as the iconographic programs discussed above, we are left with Dainzú as a virtually unique phenomenon. A game that is only represented at the site of Dainzú – apart from one isolated stone at Monte Alban – but that was so important at this particular site that it merited the construction of a whole complex of architecture in its honor. Is it probable, then, that the Dainzú reliefs actually depict a game, and if not, can we give an alternative interpretation of the Dainzú program? In the next section, I will argue that these reliefs do not necessarily depict a type of ballgame, or another kind of game whatsoever, and that other interpretations are possible. One of these interpretations could be that the Dainzú reliefs depict a military conquest scene, in which the ruler of Dainzú is shown conquering warriors from another place.

Possible alternative interpretations

Which reasons are there to interpret the Dainzú reliefs as the outcome of some kind of ritual game, be it a ballgame or a combat sport? As we have seen before, according to Ignacio Bernal these figures represented ballplayers because "each of them carries a ball in one hand as identification […].The protection of arms and knees and the mask reinforce this interpretation" (Bernal 1979: 16). Javier Urcid (2014) has agreed with this interpretation, seeing the balls as a form of synecdoche, identifying the figures as ballplayers. Moreover, in the movements and postures of the figures, Bernal saw the movements of players engaged in an active kind of ballgame (Bernal 1973:17, 1968:248). As a result, the Dainzú corpus has traditionally been identified as a type of (ball)game or game-related ritual. Urcid (2014) believes that the reliefs represent a game played with a small rubber ball,. Orr (2003) argues for a type of combat sport, which she still prefers to call a ballgame. Taladoire (2003) envisions a type of handball game played with rubber balls that spread from Guatemala to Oaxaca, bringing with it the peculiar *palangana* type ball court (which has not been found at Dainzú), and Taube and Zender (2009) identify the Dainzú figures as boxers.
I will consider the main arguments for these identifications and attempt to provide an alternative interpretation.

Balls and Attire

The most obvious reason to associate the Dainzú reliefs with a ballgame, are the balls that the figures seem to hold in their hands. What type of ball they are holding, however, seems impossible to establish. As we have seen, Bernal (1979:27), Urcid (2014), and Taladoire (2003), have proposed that the ball the figures are holding is a rubber ball, since they prefer an interpretation of the reliefs representing a type of rubber ballgame. Heather Orr (2003:83) and Karl Taube and Marc Zender (2009) propose that the ball was made of stone, since they see the Dainzú 'game' as a type of combat ritual, in which more damage would be inflicted by a stone than by a rubber ball. While I do not think it is very probable, the balls could also have been made of copal incense, tobacco, or any type of other material that was used to be burned in ritual offerings. In any case, it seems unlikely that we will ever be able to determine the material of which the balls in the Dainzú reliefs were made with any certainty.
Another important reason for seeing the Dainzú reliefs as the representation of a kind of game is the attire of the players. The sturdy helmets, gloves, and knee protection suggest to most authors the need for protection in a type of rough game (Bernal 1968: 250; Orr 2003; Taladoire 2003). However, if we see the Dainzú reliefs as a type of rubber-ball game, similar to pelota mixteca, it seems that there is no need for the use of helmets. Of course, it could be that the game was so rough that players ran the risk of being injured in the head, but this also goes for modern-day pelota mixteca,

and probably also for the traditional hip-ballgame. The necessity of using a helmet in the Dainzú type game, while it is absent in other Mesoamerican rubber-ballgames, then, does not seem obvious. On the other hand, if we accept Orr's (2003:92) and Taube and Zender's (2009) hypothesis that the Dainzú reliefs depict a type of combat sport, in which helmets were used to protect the head from injuries occurred in fighting, the use of helmets seems more appropriate.

Postures and Team Affiliations

Since the Dainzú reliefs have traditionally been identified as a type of game, and games usually comprise competing individuals or teams, it has been customary to hypothesize the existence of two different teams represented on the slabs. While Heather Orr (2003:84), for unclear reasons, sees evidence for one-on-one competition in the slabs, according to Eric Taladoire (2003:327) "there is little doubt that the Complex A slabs […] represent two opposing teams." Javier Urcid (2014) has proposed that the losing team was comprised of those players of the corpus that have the so-called ´buccal mask' related to the Rain-Lightning god Cociyo, since the only stone from Monte Alban representing a Dainzú-type helmet has this type of buccal mask (Fig. 35). Therefore, he reasons that the losing team came from Monte Albán, and the Complex A scene depicts a victory of the Dainzú ballgame team over the Monte Albán team.

Two objections seem pertinent to this analysis. First, as has already been noted by Taladoire (2003:326), if we see the ornaments on the helmets as the main criterion to separate the teams, one team would be comprised of eight players, while the other team has a total of twenty-one players. Second, and in my view more significantly, the postures of all of the individuals in the Dainzú reliefs seem to be those of defeat (cf. Orr 2003:83). Some are falling backward, while others are lying on the ground. Some are kneeling as if begging for their lives, while others seem to be falling flat on their face. These postures are not those of persons actively engaged in play, but rather people being hit, falling to the ground wounded, or maybe even dying. If we accept the two-team hypothesis, this would mean that both teams are losing. For not only the figures with the buccal Cociyo masks are falling over, some of the figures with the 'jaguar' masks also seem to be in quite a dismal condition (for example 47, 36, 42, 27 a.o.; Fig. 36). It seems more likely that all the figures belong to the same group, be it a sports team, an army, a group of dancers, or whatever other type. In the way that they are represented, the Dainzú figures are more reminiscent of the *danzantes* from Monte Alban. These figures are thought by some to represent sacrificed war captives (Scott 1978), while others have suggested that they represent noblemen engaged in bloodletting from their genitals (Urcid 2011). On the basis of the interpretation of the figures of Dainzú as defeated persons (whether they are players, warriors, or something else), we might assume - in contrast to what Taladoire (2003:327),

Urcid (2014), and Bernal and Seuffert (1979: 26) have argued - that we are not seeing a depiction of two different teams here. Rather, it looks more like all the figures are shown in defeat, facing the one standing figure (stone 1) who appears to have conquered all of them.

Sacrifice

Another argument that has been used to relate the Dainzú reliefs to the ballgame is the presumed sacrifice associated with the game, as possibly depicted on stone 1 from Complex A, stone 5 from Cerro Dainzú, and the so-called *tzompantli* group from Cerro Dainzú. For the first two, it has been argued that the blades that the standing figures appear to be holding "imply the impending sacrifice of the defeated players in both scenes" (Orr 2003:83). In the case of the latter, Bernal and Seuffert (1979:22-23) have proposed that the *tzompantli* group might represent the decapitated heads of a team of players that had lost a game. In addition, they suggested that the curvilinear element shown under the helmets of the figures represents blood spewing from the necks of the individuals, suggesting decapitation (*ibid*.:16). This, however, seems improbable since the two standing figures of stone 1 from Complex A and stone 5 of Cerro Dainzú also have this element, and these two figures were certainly not sacrificial victims. It seems more probable that the curvilinear elements represent a type of necklace or cord that attaches the helmet to the neck.

It is possible that the Dainzú corpus alludes to human sacrifice, possibly by decapitation. However, a few things should be noted. First, even if the *tzompantli* group really depicts an actual *tzompantli* and the Complex A stone 1 and Cerro Dainzú Stone 5 refer to sacrifice, this is no proof for the existence of a (ball)game. While it is possible that human sacrifice was an integral part of the ceremonies and rituals surrounding the traditional *ollama*-type hip-ballgame, human sacrifice was in no way restricted to the ballgame. Second, it seems to be a pan-Mesoamerican convention to depict sacrificial victims barely clad, mostly just wearing a loincloth, or sometimes even nude. A case in point in regard to both issues raised above is the *danzantes* corpus from Monte Albán (Scott 1978). These carvings were made in the same region as those at Dainzú, and mostly date to the Monte Albán I period, contemporaneous with or directly preceding the creation of the main Dainzú corpus. The widely accepted interpretation of these reliefs is that they represent war captives that have been stripped of most of their gear, mutilated and killed - presumably in a type of sacrifice (Scott 1978:26). While it has been suggested that these *danzantes* might represent a team that had lost at a ballgame (Bernal and Seuffert 1979), no convincing evidence of this theory has been advanced. As to the second point, the explicit nudity and mutilation of the *danzantes* form a marked contrast to the heavily clad figures of the Dainzú corpus. It should also be noted that the *tzompantli* group

depicts helmets, rather than actual heads. As a result, there is no certainty as to whether these scenes actually represent decapitation or whether they just show helmets.

Synthesis and Conclusions

In the foregoing, I have tried to highlight several aspects of the Dainzú iconographic program:

1. The apparent uniqueness of the Dainzú corpus,
2. The recurrent focus on the representation of the corpus as a type of game or ritual,
3. That the interpretation of Dainzú as a ballgame seems to be based solely on the representation of a ball in the hands of the figures represented.

However, other possible interpretations of the Dainzú corpus exist (see for example Taube and Zender 2009). Below, I will propose that, rather than depicting a type of (ritual) game, the Dainzú corpus represents the result of a conflict or warfare between the rulers of Dainzú and another group or polity.

A new perspective on Dainzú?

Over the course of this chapter, we have seen that several types of ballgames existed in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. In 16th century dictionaries we find a hip-ballgame, a (probably Spanish) hand-ballgame, and a knee-ballgame. Of these games, 16th-century chroniclers only mention the well-known hip-ballgame. Likewise, in the pre-Columbian Mixtec and Aztec codices, we have seen that only the hip-ballgame is represented. Finally, in the murals of Tepantitla several games are depicted - a stick-ballgame, a football game, and several modalities of the hip-ballgame.

Since none of these games resemble the hypothesized ritual game that has been thought to be represented at Dainzú, it seems doubtful that an independent ballgame tradition existed at this site. Not only because there is a well-documented tradition of the hip-ballgame around the same time and place, but especially because – as I have tried to show – the Dainzú corpus is unique in its kind. Several sites in the Valley of Oaxaca that are contemporaneous with Dainzú – most notably Monte Albán and San José Mogote - have I-shaped ball courts (Marcus and Flannery 1996:190), indicating that the hip-ballgame was played there. Ball court models found in Western Mexico show that the way of playing the hip-ballgame has remained the same from the Late Formative, the time period to which the Dainzú reliefs date, to the present (i.e. Whittington 2001: fig. 29, fig. 30). Eric Taladoire's argument (2003:339-340) that the Dainzú reliefs represent a type of hand-ballgame that rose to prominence in Highland Guatemala during the Early Classic period when Teotihuacan exerted a heavy influence on this region seems problematic due to the lack of depictions of a hand-ballgame in the Tepantitla murals. In all, postulating the existence of a unique Dainzú hand-ballgame tradition

and relating this to the only other evidence of hand-ballgames – those mentioned in the 16th century dictionaries – seems to be an overextension of the evidence.

As a consequence, I would like to propose that the Dainzú corpus, rather than depicting a type of ritual game, represents (the outcome of) a battle between the elite and/or the polity of Dainzú and another polity or group. This interpretation would not change the understanding of the underlying message of the whole iconographic program: a message of political power, glorifying the rulers of Dainzú (cf. Orr 2003: 93 and Urcid 2014). This message might even be more appropriate if we see the Complex A program as a ruler of Dainzú standing victoriously over his fallen adversaries. Of course, stone balls/weapons that can inflict physical damage, protective gear to protect oneself from this damage, and the division of the figures into opposing groups, features which have been presented as indications of the existence of a violent ritual game, are also clearly coherent with the interpretation of the corpus as depicting conflict or warfare.

What is important to note is that only part of the original Dainzú corpus is known today, and that, due to the long occupation of the site from the Late Formative to the Early Postclassic, many of the slabs have been reused and are not in their original position. All of the Complex A slabs – possibly except for Stone 1 - seem to be out of their original context. Some other slabs were found in the nearby villages of Macuilxóchitl and Tlacochahuaya, and others were reused in other buildings of the site. As a consequence we only have a fragmentary insight into the narrative sequence that the corpus once formed. It is possible that other stones from the same original corpus might still be found on or around the site. Especially significant are Dainzú reliefs no. 85 and 86 (D-85, D-86, Bernal and Oliveros 1988: foto 5, foto 6; Fig. 37), that were found in Complex B, one of the oldest buildings at Dainzú. D-85 represents a figure who wears attire similar to, but definitely not the same as, that of the figures of the Complex A corpus, that is, walking over a possible place-sign. D-86 represents a figure identical to the figures from Complex A. He is wearing a helmet, a cape, knee protectors, and the same type of trousers or pants. He also seems to be holding a ball in his upraised right hand and appears to be walking to the right. This suggestion of movement is confirmed by the footprints that are shown under his feet, a Mesoamerican iconographic convention indicating movement from one place to another. This posture is totally different from the figures represented in both the Complex A corpus and the reliefs from Cerro Dainzú. Whereas Complex A and Cerro Dainzú seem to represent scenes that took place as the result of another event, D-86 may well represent a scene taking place as a prelude to something else: a figure walking towards another place to perform a certain action. Since we cannot know how many slabs of the original context we are missing, especially because we do not know which buildings were originally decorated with slabs, we cannot say anything definitive about the original meaning of the slabs. However, taking into consideration D-85 and D-86 –

depicting a figure walking over or possibly conquering a certain place (D-85), and a figure clad in protective gear walking towards a certain place – it seems possible that the original corpus depicted a successful war campaign, ending in the victory of the Dainzú rulers. This victory may have resulted in the execution through sacrifice of the losing parties, depicted in the Complex A and Cerro Dainzú iconography. Whether this conflict was a war for territorial conquest or a different type of warfare, for example ritual warfare or a raid aimed at capturing rival nobles or destroying certain buildings (Workinger and Joyce 2009) is unclear. This type of iconographical program in monumental architecture is in no way unique for the region at that time, considering for example Monte Alban Building J and the *danzante* figures from Building L-sub (Marcus and Flannery 1996: 195-199; Workinger and Joyce 2009).

To conclude, I do not purport that the interpretation of the Dainzú corpus presented above is necessarily correct. However, considering that it is based on less assumptions and conjectures than the postulation of a type of ballgame that is not evidenced anywhere else in Mesoamerica, I think that it warrants further investigation. At the very least, what I have tried to show is that the focus on the representation of some kind of game in the Dainzú reliefs should be thoroughly reconsidered.

Conclusions to Part I

In the foregoing three chapters, I have presented an introduction to how pelota mixteca is played and have tried to show that pelota mixteca is a game of European origin that has no pre-Columbian precursors. Pelota a mano was introduced in Mexico at some point in the early Colonial period. Between the moment of its introduction and the beginning of the twentieth century the game came to be seen as one of Mexico's *juegos y deportes autóctonos*, one of the indigenous games of the country. Above, I have briefly attempted to sketch how this changing view of the game from Spanish pelota to indigenous pelota mixteca might have come about. Clearly, sixteenth-century globalization heavily impacted Mesoamerican sports cultures in many ways and was also responsible for the creation/invention of pelota mixteca as an indigenous game.

In the following four chapters, I will extend this research into the impact of globalization on Mesoamerican sports cultures, focusing on twentieth-century globalization and its influence on pelota mixteca. How has contemporary globalization influenced the way the game is played? Where it is played and what is the popularity of the game among contemporary Oaxacans? How have the independence of Mexico, the formation of the Mexican nation-state and the Mexican Revolution influenced the interactions between (players of) pelota mixteca and the state? And what does the 'indigenous label' that the game gained as a result of the development of Spanish pelota into pelota

mixteca mean in a globalized world, in which mass media, consumer culture and cultural homogenization exert a heavy influence on individuals worldwide? In the following chapters, I will explore these questions further, starting with an overview of theories of cultural globalization.