

Ancient Toy War Club from Qwu?gwes Wet Site, Olympia, Washington, U.S.A.

By Dale Croes

A unique artifact identified as a “Toy War Club” was recovered at Qwu?gwes and appears to reflect an example of children’s cultural material at the site (Figures [208], 296 and 297).



Figure 208. Example of cherry bark binding on a miniature toy war club from Qwu?gwes wet site (mm scale; N19E12, 40-45, 2007).



Figure 296. Toy war club in situ in intertidal shell-midden (N19E12, 40-45, 2007).

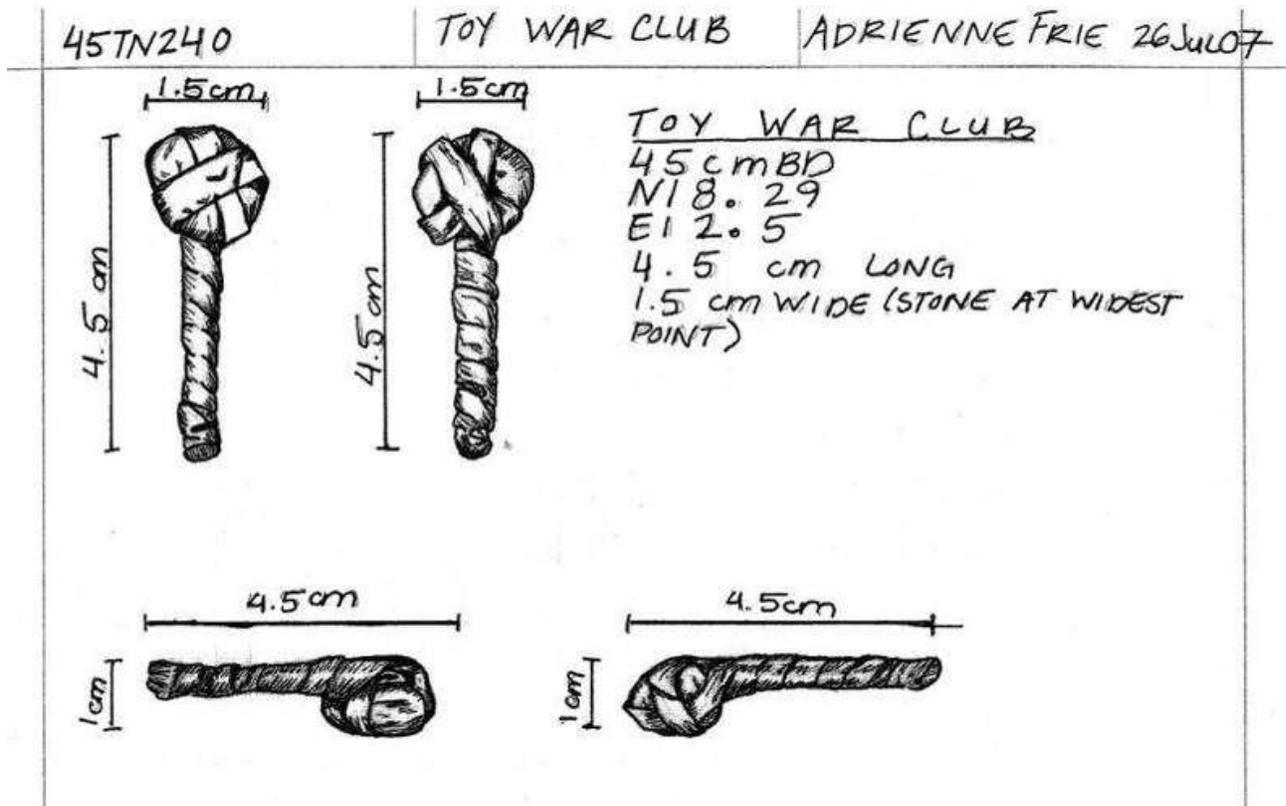


Figure 297. Field drawing of all four sides of the toy war club showing the small size measurements (Illustration by Adrienne Frie, 2007).

This artifact was one of the few composite artifacts, combining stone and fiber, found at Qwu?gwes. It was constructed by attaching a stone pebble head to a red cedar split wood handle using cherry bark strips as the binding material. Although this artifact was small, the discovery of a toy used in play by a child on the beach 600 years ago is a truly spectacular and very human find.

In an archaeological context, if this were not a wet site, the only part of this composite artifact that would have been “found” would be the unaltered stone pebble, which certainly would not be recognized as anything cultural.

Toys are not common in Northwest Coast wet sites, except in the mudslide encasement of the longhouses in the Ozette Village wet site (below). In discussing identification of toys in her book *The Archaeology of Childhood: Children, Gender, and Material Culture*, Jane Eva Baxter states that “the primary assumption that underlies the archaeological identification of objects as toys is their size: small size equates to a small person” (2005:46).

To best present the workmanship involved in this toy, and understanding children lose their toys, the maker might not have spent very much time constructing the toy, though it was done with considerable skill (Figure 298).

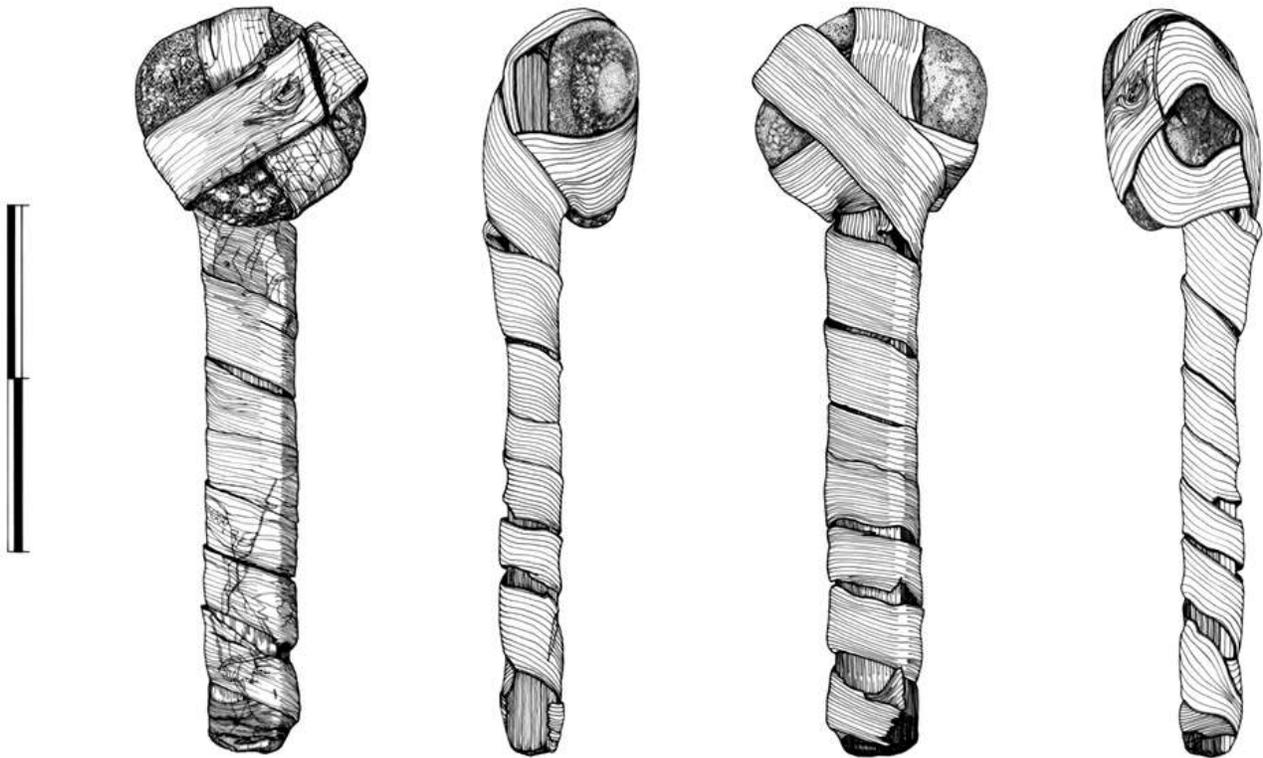


Figure 298. Four sides of toy war club showing the considerable skill in creating this expedient toy (scale = cm, so very small; N19E12, 40-45, 2007); the handle is split cedar wood, the wrapping is a cherry bark strip and the head is a green sedimentary pebble (Illustration by Candra Zhang, 2009).

This toy likely was a gift to a young person, probably a relative of the maker. Baxter further explores the social role of toys as gifts as follows:

As toys are often presented to children as gifts, they also serve as an important bonding mechanism between adults and children. Often toys are given to children as an integral part of important family-centered rituals, such as holidays, festivals, and birthdays. These rituals imbue toys with a certain level of importance and meaning in the relationship between the giver and the recipient (Sutton-Smith 1986). However, the messages that come with such gifts are often contradictory. A toy is an object given to a child by an adult, yet children are told to take the toy and play with it by themselves or with other members of their peer group. Toys are also presented as something other than “real,” yet at the same time children are expected to learn something by playing with them (Sutton-Smith 1994:141) (Baxter 2005:42).

It is important, however, not to equate European customs to the ancient Squi-Aitl people and recognize that there are extreme differences in customs and beliefs (Squaxin Island Tribe, Cultural Resources Department 2008).

In further discussing toys as opposed to full fledged tools in a social and/or ancient context, Baxter points out:

Adults see toys as a formal category of objects, generally made or purchased by them to be given to children. According to Brian Sutton-Smith (1994:143) toys tend to be defined by adults in opposition to tools: "Tools have clear-cut, practical usage and consequences. Toys do not." What toys are designed to facilitate, then, is the ability of children to mimic adult actions without real-world consequences (Sutton-Smith 1986, 1994) (Baxter 2005:42).

In this sense, the Qwu?gwes toy war club's small size makes sense; a larger or full-size war club used by a child as a toy could have undesired "real-world consequences."

Baxter also discusses how a toy, such as the Qwu?gwes war club, would be important as "tools" in a child's training to be an adult:

In another sense, toys can be seen as tools when adults use them to convey information about their children and reinforce lessons of proper roles and behaviors in their children (Calvert 1992a). Adults use toys as a means of defining age, gender, and social class, and as a mechanism for delegating particular tasks, behaviors, and attitudes. As well as amusing children, toys are used to reinforce cultural messages about proper roles and behaviors (Calvert 1992a, 1992b; Formanek-Brunell 1992; Masters 1986; Mergen 1992; Sutton-Smith 1986). This juxtaposition of communication and amusement makes toys an important element of socialization; they impart particular tasks and attitudes to children while disguising underlying motives (Masters 1986). Adults provide toys that represent and augment cultural ideas about appropriate behaviors, expectations, and attitudes, and perceive toys as a means to reinforce nonverbally the lessons of socialization presented more directly in other interactions with their children (Baxter 2005:42).

Warfare and warriors play a prominent part in Northwest Coast ethnographies and also are commonly seen through archaeological evidence. Ames and Maschner devote a chapter to warfare in their book *Peoples of the Northwest Coast; Their Archaeology and Prehistory* (1999:195-218). They provided archaeological evidence for warfare from earliest sites in the Northwest through the late period. Three lines of evidence for ancient warfare are provided: (1) burials with skeletal injuries or death caused by violence, (2) defensive sites and fortifications, and (3) tools or weapons that could only be useful for conflicts (1999:209).

Going to war or defending your family are two separate actions and should not always be connected as one. Generally children in Native societies learn by watching, then slowly participating until they have learned a particular skill. Since most tools within an ancient community were multi-task tools, the war clubs adults used would definitely expedite the killing of any mammal (Squaxin Island Tribe, Cultural Resources Department 2009).

Regional Comparison

At the 300 year old Makah Ozette Village wet site, where almost everything was found in buried long-houses, over 50 miniatures were reported (Gleeson 1980), including small whalebone war clubs, carved wooden canoes, paddles, whale harpoons, whales, bows, arrows, loom uprights and cross-beams as well as small woven hats and baskets—all likely toys for children's adult training and probably separated for use by gender to at least some degree.

Other signs of warfare are evident in the archaeological record at the ancient Ozette Village wet site. In addition to the miniature/toy whalebone war clubs mentioned, 1,534 actual arrow shafts and 5,189 wooden arrow points were found in the houses (Gleeson 1980, Draper 1989:6); no doubt these huge numbers reflect defensive munitions and not just hunting. Arrows were found placed at the top ends of the sleeping platforms, certainly for easy retrieval in case of an evening or early morning raid.

Therefore, the use of a toy war club to train a child to imagine being a warrior at Qwu?gwes is probably expected, providing us a glimpse of this ancient and important socialization. However, the child losing it on the beach was no doubt an accident (and likely frustrating to the child!).

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