

CROCKERY VALLEY CLUB

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River Hills Kilns Mills Institute™ | Diachronic Anthropology of the Crown of the Ohio



When Children Made Their Marbles

A handful of local clay became a pocketful of playthings.



Dave Kosak's Oct. 2, 2026 post identifies this museum object in Stari Grad, Croatia, as a Greek clay mold for game pieces, c. 300 BCE. Screenshot supplied by Terry.

"The writer can well remember as a child of burning marbles made of clay in those ovens having but followed the efforts of the older children as it had been handed down."

W. A. CALHOUN • ORIGINAL PAGE 3 [1]

Calhoun recalls firing his own clay marbles in outdoor baking ovens, following older children. He describes ovens built from clay mixed with chopped straw, and later from brick. [1]

"These ovens were undoubtedly in the earlier days the cause of the making and firing of many small articles of crude pottery"

Calhoun, Early Clay Industries, original page 2; original spelling. [1]

ROLL THE CLAY. HARDEN THE BALL.

Children rolled damp clay into balls, then sun-dried or fired them. At Sanquhar, Scotland, brickworkers fired children's clay "bools." John Washington, Booker T. Washington's older brother, recalled firing red-clay marbles in fireplace ashes: gentle heat first, then increasing heat to prevent cracking. He later applied that lesson to brick firing at Tuskegee. [2, 3] Prehistoric clay balls also occur, but their use as children's marbles remains uncertain. [4]

[1] W. A. Calhoun, Early Clay Industries of the Upper Ohio Valley, original typescript pp. 2-3. ELHS transcription.

[2] Future Museum, "Marbles or 'bools'," Sanquhar Brickworks, SQTM001n. See also dúchas, "Homemade Marbles."

[3] John Washington to Asa Duncan, Aug. 20, 1913; in Barry Mackintosh, The Hales Ford Community, pp. 23-24.

[4] Ness of Brodgar Project, "Focus on finds: small clay balls" (2023): 31 Neolithic balls; game-piece interpretation uncertain.

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