



# **Anetso, the Cherokee Ball Game: At the Center of Ceremony and Identity (First Peoples New Directions in Indigenous Studies)**

*Michael J. Zogry*

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Anetso, a centuries-old Cherokee ball game still played today, is a vigorous, sometimes violent activity that rewards speed, strength, and agility. At the same time, it is the focus of several linked ritual activities. Is it a sport? Is it a religious ritual? Could it possibly be both? Why has it lasted so long, surviving through centuries of upheaval and change?

Based on his work in the field and in the archives, Michael J. Zogry argues that members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Nation continue to perform selected aspects of their cultural identity by engaging in anetso, itself the hub of an extended ceremonial complex, or cycle. A precursor to lacrosse, anetso appears in all manner of Cherokee cultural narratives and has figured prominently in the written accounts of non-Cherokee observers for almost three hundred years. The anetso ceremonial complex incorporates a variety of activities which, taken together, complicate standard scholarly distinctions such as game versus ritual, public display versus private performance, and tradition versus innovation.

Zogry's examination provides a striking opportunity for rethinking the understanding of ritual and performance as well as their relationship to cultural identity. It also offers a sharp reappraisal of scholarly discourse on the Cherokee religious system, with particular focus on the Eastern Band of Cherokee Nation.

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