GENDERING MAYA BALLGAME IMAGERY

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

INTRODUCTION

Carved in high relief, Block VII from Hieroglyphic Stair 2 at Yaxchilan bears a central figure kneeling in profile, turned to the left and facing a glyphic staircase (Fig. 1). The figure is identified as Yaxun Bahlam IV.[1] He wears a loincloth, knee guards, and sandals, all elaborately ornamented. He bears a ceremonial bar across his torso, with a tall decorative headdress that reaches the top of the stone relief. The detailing of his outfit is intricate, displaying the knowledge of the artisans commissioned to make the piece as well as the wealth of the patron. A prisoner encased within a ball floats in space between the staircase and Yaxun Bahlam IV. This figure, captured and glyphically named, serves as a reminder of Yaxun Bahlam IV's military skill. Two smaller figures, identified as dwarves, stand behind him, representing spiritual connections to the ritual enacted (Nolan 2015, 179). This stone block is part of the Hieroglyphic Staircase located on Structure 33 of Yaxchilan, an edifice that was built to honor Yaxun Bahlam IV's rulership and legacy. The hieroglyphic staircase has a wide array of glyphs that have been translated to boast of Yaxun Bahlam IV's accomplishments (Nolan 2015, 176). As I argue in this thesis, the emphasis on the ballgame at Structure 33 also promotes Yaxun Bahlam IV's power via his masculinity. Of the decorated thirteen blocks on this structure, most depict men in active poses playing the game. Four blocks represent women and are unique in Maya art for their inclusion of women at the ballgame. These women, however, are in secondary positions, revealing that women could watch the game but not participate.

Throughout the frequent depictions of the Maya ballgame in a variety of formats – from stone sculptures to ceramic figures and vessels – women are never shown, suggesting that the

[1] For the purposes of this thesis, I will be referring to the figures by their Maya names rather than their English given names: Yaxun Bahlam IV for Bird Jaguar, Itzamnaaj Bahlam III for Shield Jaguar, and Lady Xook for Lady Shark Fin.

ballgame was considered a masculine domain. The exception is found at the site of Yaxchilan. This thesis explores ballgame imagery to show that the Maya ballgame was gendered male through a connection of masculine identifiers, depictions, and power. As such, images of the ballgame celebrate masculine power. This is complicated by an analysis of ballgame imagery at Yaxchilan, the only Classic period Maya city that portrays women in association with the game. The monumental depictions of the ballgame serve to legitimize the ruler's authority through its masculine discourse. This thesis shows that the Maya ballgame was gendered as masculine and in so doing will lend itself to closer consideration of female presence, or lack thereof, in some facets of Maya politics and society. It negotiates a space within Maya scholarship to reevaluate the default category of male and masculine that have so far been taken at face value and seen as unremarkable. However, acknowledging the exclusion of women from certain spaces nuances our understanding of gender and power relations in the Mesoamerican world.

The hip ballgame is a popular subject within Mesoamerican and Maya visual culture. There are iterations of ballgames throughout Mesoamerica, and the differences vary based on size of site and regional location. The ball game was played with a solid rubber ball wherein the ball was mainly struck with the hips, buttocks, and knee. Masonry courts are found in many Maya cities. During the Classic period, the game was often played on masonry courts with two teams of seven players, and the playing of the game continues in contemporary Indigenous communities in the form of a game called *ulama* (Aguilar-Moreno 2015, 101).

Ethnographies and colonial works, such as the post-conquest narrative known as the Popol Vuh, have documented descriptions of the ballgame and its symbolic importance (Miller 2001, 85); these are important sources since they come from oral histories and the communities themselves. Compiled by the surviving K'iche'-Maya court, the Popol Vuh documents the

creation of the world and the traditions central to their culture (Christenson and Sachse 2021, 3). The Popol Vuh narrative has become formative within Maya studies for offering the narrative explanation of the containment of calamity and the renewal of life on earth. The cosmological mythos tells of Twin Heroes who played a ballgame that disturbed the lords of the underworld, or Xibalba. The Lords of Death challenged the original twins to a ballgame where the twins lost the game, and the Lords of Death sacrificed them and buried them under the ballcourt. One of these two original heroes begot the Hero Twins who later traveled to Xibalba and defeated the Lords of Death who sacrificed their father (Freidel et al. 1993, 345-348). The Popol Vuh details explanations for human sacrifice as a form of ritual reciprocity wherein the Maya would sacrifice blood in order for the gods to oversee the crop growth and success. It was assumed early on that the sacrificed victims were the losing team of the ballgame (Muriel and Blaine 2012, 211). This element of reciprocity, tied in with sacrifice and cosmological symbolism, has been central to early scholarship concerning the ballgame.

There have been many studies of the Mesoamerican ballgame that cross-apply cosmology from the Popol Vuh to Classic Maya culture, architecture, and art. Marvin Cohodas (1975) analyzed sculptural elements of the ballcourt in Chichen Itza, a Postclassic site in the Yucatán, and suggested they were related to an agricultural ritual function. Utilizing cosmology from the Popul Vuh, he proposed that each of these elements served as symbolic representations of a mythical battle, from the directions the structures faced to the images carved in high relief on the benches of the court (Cohodas 1975, 113-115). Ultimately, Cohodas argues that the ballgame was used symbolically to encourage the cycle of the sun and an agricultural ritual. This ritual would consist of sacrifice to assure that their crops would revitalize. The game symbolically mirrors the cycle of the sun rising and falling as a cycle of rebirth.

Mary Miller and Stephen Houston (1987) studied depictions of the ballgame in tandem to visual culture and architectural space. They connect the architectural space (i.e. the court or attached stairway) with the game depicted in art, correlating the ballgame imagery shown with activity that takes place. In this article, Miller and Houston (1987, 63) argue that the ballgame is more than a "frivolous sport: it was, rather, a ritual correlate of war and human sacrifice." Here, they connect back to the Popul Vuh just as Cohodas did. Once more drawing on the Popol Vuh to understand the ballgame, Miller (2001) worked through the spiritual aspects. She reaffirms that human sacrifice and rebirth are evident in the game and its retelling, using the Popol Vuh and a variety of images drawn from Maya art as support for her argument.

Moving from the religious connections of the game, Robert Santley et al. (1991) considered the political implications of a centralized ballgame, suggesting that the frequency of masonry courts in Central Mexico is an indicator of the ballgame as a facilitator of political negotiation and economy. They suggest that the courts occur in centers that are decentralized, namely areas where political regimes were conflicted and competitive. Positing that these games were politicized, they argue that the courts correspond to the local political climate. In a similar vein, Suzanne Nolan (2015) focuses specifically on Yaxchilan and the Hieroglyphic Stair constructed by Yaxun Bahlam IV. In this holistic study, Nolan (2015, 3) examines the archaeological and linguistic evidence to argue that "Yaxchilan underwent a period of centralization before decentralization and collapse." While she does not closely examine the gender dynamics at play, she does a thorough analysis of each of the blocks on the stair and notes the unusual addition of the women in the scene. Verónica Amellali Vázquez López (2017, 27) uses the term "athletic hegemonism" (coined by Helmke et al. 2015, 21) to express how the Kaanul dynasty utilized the ballgame to display the bond between two sociopolitical units, such

as between Calakmul and their secondary vassals. It was because of the prevalence of the ballgame within Mesoamerican society that the imagery of the ballgame served as a symbolic marker of the relationships between rulers and sites. Vázquez López, as well as Helmke, use the term hegemony to indicate how the ballgame moved beyond a sport to create a powerful, political network between communities.

The ballgame has also been considered for its violence and sacrificial elements. Artworks reveal this association with sacrifice. For example, Adriana Agüero and Annick Daneels (2009) proposed that in Veracruz, elites utilized the ballgame as a political tool to emphasize their violence and legitimize their power. Agüero and Daneels (2009, 118) analyze ballgame iconography and suggest that dress elements, such as yokes and palmas, were held by the noble class and used as offerings following the game. Connecting the game to warfare, they posit that the elite promoted the game as a form of social control, supporting their own dominance. Alejandro Martínez Muriel and Emilie Carreón Blaine (2012) used bioarchaeology to analyze burials associated with ballcourts, concluding that their research has cast doubt onto the assumption that it was the ballplayers who were sacrificed and stressing the importance of integration of osteological analysis into Mesoamerican studies. Barbara L. Stark and Wesley D. Stoner (2017) tracked architectural visibility to weigh the voyeurism of violence prominent with the ballgame. They come to the conclusion that the masonry courts were more exclusive than open plazas and were likely intended for ritual and sacred functions. These studies have connected the Mesoamerican ballgame to a number of topics from warfare to sacrifice to religion and politics. However, there is a distinct lack of investigation into the gender dynamics regarding

the Maya ballgame.[2] These clearly masculine spaces have been regarded as neutral, unmarked categories that do not warrant further scrutiny.

The ballgame as a clearly gendered space has not been thoroughly explored in contemporary scholarship on Mesoamerican gender. In her study of gender in Mesoamerica Rosemary Joyce (2000, 80) notes, a "ballplayer's protective wrapping combines the short beaded kilt with a different loincloth," where the loincloth becomes an identifier of the male gender. Kathryn Josserand (2002, 136) gets closer to exploring gender in the ballgame with her comment, "although women are never shown as ballplayers, they do appear in association with the game." Here she cites the Yaxchilan staircase, but does not fully consider what the lack of women participating in the game reveals about Maya society. And in his study of young men in Classic Maya art, one of the only instances in which Stephen Houston (2018, 124) brings up the ballgame is to maintain that "older men bathed and played ballgames." These discussions of gender in Maya society can and should be more nuanced and intersectional. Finding the spaces where marginalized figures (women, queer, disabled, etc.) occupy space or are excluded nuances the traditional perspective in scholarship.

In this thesis, I first show how the ballgame was a male-dominated sport and how ballcourts were constructed as masculinized spaces free of female interference. The first section of this thesis will be a detailed analysis of gender dynamics in Maya art and in relation to ballgames. I then consider monumental ballgame imagery at a particular Classic Maya site, Yaxchilan, to show how these images were a response to periods of instability and competition when masculine identity needed to be stressed to legitimize the male ruler's authority. For this

[2] While the Maya ballgame has not been investigated in terms of gender dynamics, Douglas E. Bradley (2001) posited that the Olmec featured female players and linked the ballgame legacy to fertility. His analysis of the sculptural figures and ultimate conclusion are not entirely supported, but he is the only precedent to this gender study.

section, I have chosen to focus on representations of gender at the site of Yaxchilan because it has well-known monumental depictions of both ballgames and a contrasting female political power. Yaxchilan also remains the only known location where women are shown in association with the ballgame.

SECTION ONE: GENDER AND THE BALLGAME

Gender is a construct. It is defined not by any one label or culture, but rather is a dynamic state of being. I separate gender from biological sex and consider it as the appearance and presentation of the individual. In her prominent early feminist text, Simone de Beauvoir (2015, 39) suggests that a woman is not born but rather becomes. De Beauvoir's concept was expanded and elaborated upon by philosopher and theorist Judith Butler (1988) who argued that gender is performed, with repeated actions supplementing the performance of one gender or another. The emphasis is on the historical situation and the actions renewed throughout time, though it is not constituted consistently. Thus, the same can be said of any gender: a gender is not born inherent, but performed repeatedly.

However, one must acknowledge that these are western theorists with a modern, western ideal and framework that is often applied to non-western cultures. The most effective method becomes not a holistic application of the theory, but using Butler's theoretical framework to reveal distinctions that arise from questioning the seemingly immutable features of gender and the binary frame of male and female (Hershatter 2020, 912-914). In applying Butler's ideas about gender performance to Mesoamerican studies, Joyce (2000, 11-15) has argued that the material and costume ornamentation of gendered performance commonly seen in ancient Maya art are a means by which behavior could be conformed to shared standards. Often these ornamentations would be heirloom items such as pendants and beads.

Following Butler's argument of gender as a performance of repeated actions and signifiers, scholars such as Joyce and Traci Ardren (2002) apply this theory of gender performance to Mesoamerican studies and note that different facets of performativity such as

clothing, ornamentation, and repeated actions become the distinguishers of gender. Joyce (1996, 169) establishes first that the Maya body "and facial type on Classic Maya monuments is essentially sexless, and it is only by distinctive costumes and distinct signs modifying the names of females in texts that male and female actors have been identified," leading scholars to turn to alternative means to gender the figures. For example, because figures identified as female tend to wear longer skirts, these have been seen as a female marker in artistic depictions, while figures identified as male tend to wear short skirts or loincloths, which suggests that these are indicators of masculine gender. In addition, specific ornamentation that is worn has been interpreted as signifiers of gender. Joyce (2000, 60) sees huipiles, traditionally woven robe garments, as female markers. Similarly, a belt with a pendant depicting shells or fish (linguistically identified as *xoc*) can serve as a feminine signifier.

Masculinity is a state of mind and a state of power. One facet of masculine identity was military responsibility. Personal honor, identified by the numerous accounts of lords taking captives in battle, was tied to masculinity and the effectiveness of the leaders displayed in conflict (Houston 2018, 38-39). What might be a success for one lord, would be a terrible dishonor and failure on the part of the respective losing lord. Warfare is thus tied to not only legacy, but masculinity and social capital as a ruler. What becomes evident in artistic depictions and inscriptions portraying rulers is how masculinity is tied to a state of or accessibility to power.

As such, much of the iconography in Maya art depicts male rulers wielding power. There are certain items that are connected with power and rulership, such as the *k'awiil* scepter, an emblem glyph, and headdress. These items might be fundamental indicators of rulership, but due to their repeated use by male rulers they have also become signifiers of masculinity. The *k'awiil* scepter is named for the Classic period god, K'awiil, who serves as the patron of royal dynasties

and is associated with royal depictions (Rice 2012, 104). Ute Schüren (1992, 30-31) notes that emblem glyphs help distinguish the title and respective polity of one ruler from another. While these are typically included in hieroglyphic inscriptions, they also often are found incorporated into headdresses of rulers. These headdresses also often have icons associated with gods and may signify that the ruler is impersonating a deity, bringing the god's power into their depiction. While these wearers are generally men, there are a few notable exceptions. Some women were depicted with shields and/or the *k'awiil* scepter, such as Lady K'abel of El Perú-Waka'. These are women who are generally from the Kaanul dynasty, who married the male rulers, and have been argued to wield more political power (Reese-Taylor 2009, 54-55).

In contrast, femininity is a bit more nebulous in the face of the overwhelming masculinity seen in Maya art, where images of men far outnumber images of women. Though women are rarely depicted on ceramics, colonial ethnographies note that the pots were often shaped by women, suggesting they were part of the process of creation but excluded from subject matter (Houston 2018, 68-69). Women who married into royal families were more commonly noted in artistic depictions and records, yet still largely not the focus of attention.

Images where masculine signifiers are worn by women or feminine signifiers are worn by men become points of debate, suggesting that gender was based on performance and that gender was fluid in Maya society, as argued by Matthew Looper (2009, 174) through comparisons with other Indigenous cultures that have a nonbinary or third gender. Looper (2009) argues that some Maya rulers utilized androgyny to adapt to social and political contexts. Androgyny allowed rulers to present and appropriate gender qualities during ceremonial processes, indicating that a mixed gender (or nonbinary) identity could have been acquired through a transformation, or it could even have been a permanent aspect of daily life. With the loss of the lived experience of

the Classic Maya, these artworks are the closest scholars can get to understanding the dynamics of gender fluidity or nonbinary.

For example, Lady Sak K'uk as shown on the Palenque Oval Palace Tablet (Fig. 2) sits, facing her son as she hands him a war helmet. Looper (2009, 182) contends that female rulers, like Lady Sak K'uk, accessed a masculine power or trait when they impersonated the Moon Goddess, dressing in an androgynous fashion in these depictions. Here, she bears a cropped hairstyle, the net skirt and cape, and most significantly, a loincloth (Schele 1979, 12). The loincloth is knotted at her side and is more evident behind her back and over her knee. A traditionally male attire, the loincloth here supports Lady Sak K'uk's ruler status as she figuratively and literally passes the mantle over to her son, Pakal. Furthermore, the impersonation of the Moon Goddess, as Looper (2009, 182) identifies her as a mixed-gender deity, would also provide women like Lady Sak K'uk with a gender fluid space where they could emphasize their connection to warfare. Such women were often shown holding items of war such as the shield, spear, and war banner.

In Mesoamerican gender studies, Erika Hewitt (1999, 259-260) argues for a more nuanced understanding of gendered symbols and an individual as a balanced composite. Hewitt (1999, 256) acknowledges there is evidence of female rulers in Maya society, but argues they only emerge in periods of dynastic or political instability. However, there is a connection between the Kaanul dynasty, a large kingdom based at the site of Calakmul, and an emphasis in matrilineal heritage and power (Reese-Taylor et. al 2009; Jones and Spetzler 1992, 115; Josserand 2007, 299). An example of this is Lady K'abel of El Perú-Waka', a daughter of the Kaanul dynasty who married into the royalty of Waka' and is featured on her own stela (Fig. 3). In it, she wields the shield in her left hand and the scepter of power in her right. This stela is an

element of the celebration dedicated to the continuation of the cycles of time and the rulers that are instrumental to this ritual process. Olivia Navarro-Farr and her colleagues (2020, 44) argue that Lady K'abel is demonstrating her power. She is exerting items of rulership and war, and is glyphically named *ix kaloomte'*, or high king, for it. The use of this title is restricted to the highest-ranking rulers and generally men. Her husband has a corresponding stela where he faces her and bears the same items in mirror fashion. In this ceremonial event, Lady K'abel is impersonating the maize god just as her husband is, suggesting she has a powerful position (Wanyerka 1996, 82). Placing her in the same position as her husband signifies that Lady K'abel wielded power as her husband did, proving that women could hold political power. Indeed, she is also shown facing to her right, the privileged position in Maya visual culture, suggesting her power exceeded her husband's.

An alternative of women utilizing masculine identifiers is men wearing long or net skirts. Traditionally, long skirts are worn by women and associated as a feminine signifier in Maya art. However, through analysis of imagery, Looper (2009, 181) reasons that the Maize God, due to the contradictory power of rebirth and associations with the earth, occupies a third gender category alongside the Moon Goddess. Thus, when male rulers impersonate the Maize God, and bear a longer net skirt, the transformative power of this deity allows them to appropriate feminine attributes. For example, Copán's Stela H shows the ruler Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil wearing a long, elaborately beaded skirt that ends just before the ankles, much longer than men traditionally wear, as male bodies were normally exposed (Looper 2009, 178). In the case of Lady K'abel and Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil, gender is performed differently to allow these individuals to access a trait or power they would not be able to otherwise. Gender is proven to be

dynamic enough that a gender nonconforming impersonation or performance is not only accepted but revered to a degree.

In contrast to instances of gender fluidity or women in association with warfare and rulership, ballgame depictions are decidedly masculine. The images that I draw on present masculine figures, complete with glyphic inscriptions, that cannot be mistaken for any dynamic gender fluidity. Moreover, Maya depictions of the ballgame do not include female figures, with the exception of Yaxchilan as will be discussed below. The ballgame is a masculine ritual activity, and as such, excludes women.

As the most contemporary scholarship on masculine ritual activity, we turn to Houston (2018). Many of the rituals that Houston explains are exclusionary by nature. As Houston (2018, 22-24) has shown, royal young men in Classic Maya society were significant for their state of potential, actively attended to with the rites of passage and the process of aging represented on ceramic and stone objects. As children grew up, they were often separated into gendered spaces, with young men given opportunities, such as training and education, that were unavailable to girls and women (Houston 2018, 23). Young men of the elite class were inducted into masculinity through a process, being taught by elders and guardians. Maya princes endured rites of passage or rituals to prove their worth and ability to handle future responsibility.[3] Houston (2018, 119) describes these rites through Classic Maya vessels and analogous comparisons, highlighting the heirloom use of vessels in coming-of-age rituals and the gender segregated spaces where young men were taught cooperation and aggression. Comparing the Maya to the

[3] Class stratification was present in Maya society and necessary to keep in mind when considering the social ramifications of gender roles. Because of its emphasis on power, the focus of this thesis is on the elite members of Maya society.

Aztec, Houston suggests that gender segregated spaces were places to foster cooperation and initiate men into social norms.

It is worth noting that beyond the ceramic evidence of Maya perception of adolescence, examples of adolescence are typically found on ceramic vessels that depict elite or royal young men. Houston (2018, 91) notes a luminous vessel that was decorated and intended for a ritual, one associated with drinking and the ascent of adolescent boys to elite adults. Certain ceramic vessels, such as the one identified by Houston, are linked to the elite status and a process of engendering children into adulthood through a performance. Barring a single example, there are no ceramic vessels that depict princesses (Houston 2018, 51-52). These rites of passage that exclusively involve men are analogous to the ballgame.

Sports are one example of such rites of passage that have long been associated with masculinity. Early discourse of hegemonic masculinity in 1980s identified cultural attitudes that contributed to male domination over women (Jewkes et al. 2015, 113). Rachel Jewkes et al. (2015, 114) perceive this hegemony as a "cultural ideal of manhood," while sports sociologists Ramaeker and Petrie (2019, 516) observe that "men learn gender-appropriate norms through general socialization processes." They link sports with conformity, specifically masculine social norms. As Grindstaff and West (2011, 861) eloquently put it, "when scholars of gender and sport note that 'men make sports, and sports make men,' they refer to the role of sport in constructing hegemonic masculinity." In terms of Mesoamerican studies, Looper (2019, 111) draws connections between the ballgame and hunting and suggests that the ideologies of the hunt were similar to those accompanying the game. It involved symbolic capture of game, conflating the foreign relations to that of prey. The athleticism displayed in the ballgame (and the hunt) were celebrated. Elites that were undergoing these rites of passage needed to show their fitness as

warriors, whether that involved the ballgame ceremony or a physical hunt of animal. Looper (2019, 116) notes that "the image of the victorious warrior/hunter/ballplayer as a model for masculinity… is well known." Here he associates warfare, hunting, and the ballgame as equivalent signifiers of the masculine image. The ballgame, just like a form of warfare or a hunt, cultivate a masculine identity within their depictions.

BALLGAME DEPICTIONS

At the highest level, the ballgame was used as a supplement of power, with rulers in charge of the games and the construction of the courts. The authoritative figures creating and running the courts were the ones benefiting from them. Human sacrifice has been associated with the ballgame, following archaeological reports of burials and sacrificial victims within the courts or in association (Muriel and Blaine 2012, 224). As described earlier, the ballgame played by the Late Classic Maya has been associated with a Maya creation myth later recorded in the Popol Vuh (Guderjan 2021, 118). Scholars have taken this to understand that the game is a major feature of the religious practice and ritual, where sacrifice plays an inherent role in reenacting the mythos of creation. The sacrificial element is a fundamental aspect to the ballgame and the spiritual capital the game holds.

Karl Taube (2018, 297) reasons that the game balances between entertainment (a spectacle of ritual blood sport) and a religious event involving the sacrificial elements. The spectator and audience of the game are an essential aspect of the game. Sites with a larger population house multiple ballcourts, often with the most significant court closest to the city center and temples to which the elites had easiest access. The placement of the ballcourt in

relation to the surrounding area was dependent on accessibility and visibility, allowing the public to witness the spectacle of the ballgame (Stark and Stoner 2017, 412). The nobility formed alliances and trade agreements over the game, but also utilized the public aspect of the game to demonstrate to the community the privilege and authority that the elite held (Santley, et al. 1991, 4-9; Stark and Stoner 2017, 424-426). In their analysis of the visibility of the ballcourt, Stark and Stone (2017, 421) draw a distinction between formal and casual courts, attributing the formality to the architectural structures where the most ritually or politically significant games would take place. It is highly likely that the spectators of these events would be the influential and important families of a polity.

Ballgame imagery is found on ceramic media such as figurines and vessels, stone stelae, and monumental staircases. Any artistic representation would be a display of power, utilizing both a permanent form of art, stone, as well as their wealth to parade their link to the ballgame. It is significant that we find so much ballgame imagery on hieroglyphic staircases and tied to the ritual aspect of the ballgame. In her first holistic analysis of the Bonampak murals, Mary Miller (1986, 86-87, 140-141) recognizes the ballplayer attire on figures and notes that they do not seem to be in the midst of a game, but rather on a staircase. In a later reflection, Miller and Claudia Brittenham (2013, 143) connect the ballgame iconography at Bonampak to its association with a staircase, “a signal of the importance of certain key ritual practices that might transpire outside the ballcourt.” Similarly, much of the art depicting the ballgame is removed from the active ballcourt context and found in connection with temples and other ceremonial structures. This suggests that these images served a greater function than contextual panels decorating the court, and perhaps, enforced social organization.

Furthermore, in the nearly one hundred ballgame related ceramics on the Foundation for Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc. (FAMSI) Maya Vase Database, women are never shown as players.[4] The assessed vessels vary in subject matter, with some portraying a ballgame in action while others merely include associated costume and iconography. Common ballgame iconographical elements include horizontal lines representing a staircase, a large rubber ball, and ballplayers wearing simplistic or elaborate costume. Following a careful assessment of each individual vase, I determined that each depicted player wore the attire indicating masculinity, namely the loincloth. There are no women included on these vessels.

The costume of the ballplayers also signifies one's status and class. The equipment and outfits for ballgames would have been elaborate when worn by the elite (Agüero and Daneels 2009, 121). To prevent injuries from the heavy ball, the two teams of players would wear associated paraphernalia such as hide and bark coverings. The costume consisted of hide and bark coverings for elbows and knees, ornamentation made of shells and precious stones, and leather for the hips. These outfits then must have been signifiers for the power displayed by the elite, implying a political and sacred connection. The loincloth is a signifier of masculinity; thus, the visible loincloths clearly mark the players as male. The skirts that ballplayers would wear were incredibly short, contrasting the long skirts women would wear so there would be no mistaking the two.

Class and age dynamics are also present within the representations of the ballgame, with ballplayers varying in more simplistic costume to more elaborate and elite ornamentation. On a rollout view of a vessel from the Saint Louis Museum of Art (Fig. 4), eight figures are stationed along seven parallel, horizontal lines. The lines create a set of stairs, with three of the figures

[4] This study took place on February 24, 2022. http://www.famsi.org/research/kerr/

standing on the uppermost stairs looking down on the game, all marked as male by their clothing. A masculine figure is posed facing left, one hand supports his weight while the other is held up in movement, likely clasped to strike the ball. The surrounding figures on the playing arena wear similar attire including loincloths, hunting headdresses and wraps around joints to protect from damage. Their gear is not the most ostentatious, as each of the figures wears a rather humble headdress and simply designed costumes.

The vessel from the Dallas Museum of Art (Fig. 5) provides an example of a more elite ballgame scene. On a rollout view of the vessel, one of the central figures kneels before a large, black, rubber ball. The figure is a man, based on the exposed skin and the loincloth he wears, and he places a hand on the simplistic line drawn that gives the illusion of stairs. He wears either a ceremonial bar or a yoke wrapped around his waist and a headdress that extends past his head. The figures to the left and right of the central figure wear loincloths, yokes placed at waist height, and large ornamental headdresses. The arena of the ballcourt is simplistic with minimal stairs and platform accentuated. Bryan Just (2012, 78) connects Houston's text on rites of passage to this vessel, offering this scene as a nostalgic view of a lord's transition into manhood. He posits that the scene is one documenting a royal accession retrospectively. A view of the past would explain the highly decorated players when compared to the loosely painted, simplistic figures of the vessel from the Saint Louis Museum of Art.

The figure to the furthest left of the rollout of the DMA vessel reaches a hand out to the central figures. He wears a large exaggerated yoke, the stone belt or waist-guard that is bound in fabrics and his loincloth descends from it. Barring the deer headdress, this figure is strikingly similar to the ceramic figure from the Princeton University Art Museum (Fig. 6). This figure, identified as possibly from Jaina Island, wears a large, exaggerated yoke with a descending

loincloth attached. The circular bands likely represent the fabric attachments that would bind the costume together. Susanna Ekholm (1991, 243) suggests that the ceramic figurines might have served as ceremonial tool of reconstructing the ritual and function of the ballgame through a more portable means. The portable nature of the objects suggests that they had a general use, perhaps in households and amongst the "middle class" who could admire the game from afar. It is telling, however, that despite this increase in class accessibility, the Maya figurines of ballplayers are all still masculine.

The final iconographical element of the ceramics to note is the use of the zoomorphic headdresses. Marvin Cohodas (1991, 267) posits that on ceramics, the most common headdresses worn by ballplayers depict deer. In a more current publication, Looper (2019, 111) clarifies this supposition to include class, arguing that the deer headdress is more commonly worn by lower ranking men or deities rather than kings and princes. Hunting and deer imagery merged with warfare imagery, blending animal capture and sacrifice with human capture and sacrifice. Looper (2019, 112) notes that associations of the hunt, warfare, and the ballgame increase as warfare with foreign lands become metaphors for hunting in the wilds. By including hunting iconography, these vessels further support the conflation of the ballgame with warfare, serving as a war sport. This is curious as some royal Maya women are shown in monumental depictions holding warriors shields or standing on captives. In contrast, those same women never are shown playing the ballgame.

Maya ballgame imagery on ceramics vastly surpasses the number of depictions on monumental sculptures such as panels, stelas, stairs, or ballcourt markers. It is possible that ballgame imagery might have been more prevalent on exterior decorations or facades that deteriorated to time and weather. Monumental structures utilized stone and relief techniques,

requiring artists, a wealthy patron(s), and a political system to support as they were typically civic ceremonial structures. As such, all of the monumental images depict masculine figures and are likely nobles.

One typical example of a ballcourt panel (Fig. 7) is owned by the Art Institute of Chicago and is titled after its sprawled ballplayer. The central figure faces left, taking up most of the compositional space. He is fully on the ground, hand in the same glyphic pose to strike (Stone and Zender 2004, 67). To his left, a figure stands over a staircase containing a few glyphs. The uppermost portion of the panel has been fractured off. Between the two figures a large ball with glyph floats in space. The standing figure wears ballplayer attire as well, indicating that this is ballgame associated; however, the inclusion of the staircase within the image might further designate this event as a ritual. This figure is far more elaborate than the ceramic figures and is identified as Chak Ak'aach Yuhk or Great Turkey of La Corona (Martin and Grube 2008, 110). This piece is one of the most well-known ballgame panels and provides a clear example of a man playing the ballgame.

Looper (2009, 96) compares the dynamic poses of the ballplayers to images of dancing processions and festivals, noting the similarity between hand gestures and foot placement. To contrast the horizontal depictions of the previous examples, I put forth a set of ballplayer panels from La Corona that are uniquely vertical (Fig. 8). The left panel is located in the Museum of the American Indian while the right resides in the Library of Congress collection. In the left panel, a figure kneels to the right before a ball and bears the marking of a ballplayer. He wears an elaborate headdress and there are glyphs likely identifying the figure. The right figure stands more upright, with similar ballgame paraphernalia. The posture and presumed grace of the

figures make the ballgame comparable to a dance or performance that only men could enact. There is an aspect of the ballgame that is masculine and that women cannot disrupt.

The ballcourt markers and sculptural elements from Copan serve as a point of comparison to the panels. The ballcourt markers comprise three round stone panels that were originally placed in the ballcourt floor, one on each end and one in the center. The relief designs on these markers are similar to each other with few changes. As evidenced by the central secondary marker (Fig. 9), every set of markers depicts two male figures facing each other over the ball. They wear the same yoke and loincloth display as the other images, but are incorporated into a supernatural narrative presented in a quincunx, an arrangement that creates a sacred space. These markers were part of the ruler Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil's extensive architectural and sculptural campaign during his reign. Ancestral veneration was a key aspect of Copan's dynastic history with many rulers incorporating their lineage or predecessors into their architectural works as a way of using the past to support their future (Ashmore 2015, 223). Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil shows himself with an ancestor to use the importance of ancestral veneration as a form of legitimization. Stela 4, another monument that Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil commissioned, is found on the central plaza (Fig. 10). This stela is found among others depicting the ruler in various impersonations and states, all portrayals to supplement his own power and rulership. Stela 4 represents the ruler as a ballplayer, as he is bearing the short skirt, the loincloth, knee pads, and headdress. Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil was also the ruler who built the largest Copan ballcourt, indicating that he paid quite a bit of attention to the ballgame and clearly proclaimed a special relation to the game (Martin and Grube 2008, 205).

When moving from the ceramic medium to stone monument, the main difference in the people depicted in ballgame imagery comes in the form of status. The figures are still masculine

and wear loincloths. They utilize the same iconography with far more ornamentation, often exaggerating the size of the yoke or headdress to increase the number of symbols and communicate wealth or importance. The stone monuments are also often public pieces, located in accessible areas and large enough to be seen from a distance. The masculinity that is projected then becomes a form of self-promotion on the part of the ruler. The only monumental depictions of the ballgame that include women are found at Yaxchilan, but they are not shown playing the game or wearing the associated paraphernalia. These images will be discussed in Section Two.

Beyond gender dynamics and biological essentialism, what lies at the heart of this matter is the association between masculine identifiers and power opposing feminine identifiers and disenfranchisement. The ballgame is masculine because women do not play it; it is also associated with power. Therefore, one can see the game as a way to keep women from having full access to power. Furthermore, the depictions of the ballgame are masculine, with all artworks and records representing masculine figures, embodied by the loincloths and glyphic descriptions. Women are depicted holding shields and other powerful objects, and are argued to wield political power, but still are never shown actively playing the ballgame. At Yaxchilan, when women are displayed in association with the ballgame, they are spectators. They do not participate in the game and are placed at the margins of the scene. The rest of this thesis will consider the specific utilization of the masculine ballgame imagery as a support for Yaxun Bahlam IV's rule as a case study for my argument. Ultimately, I contend that when Maya rulers emphasize their association with the ballgame, that they do so to reassert their power in masculine terms, often in opposition to powerful women who they fear threaten their rule.

SECTION TWO: THE CASE OF YAXCHILAN AND YAXUN BAHLAM IV

Built on the shores of the winding Usumacinta River, the site of Yaxchilan (Fig. 11), located in Chiapas, Mexico, is comprised of almost 90 consolidated structures. Archaeological dating puts the site's origins in the fourth century. From then, it gained in power and established a hereditary rulership (Martin and Grube 2008, 137). By the Late Classic period, the political and religious center of the city had started to grow (Golden, et. al 2008, 252). Large scale occupation of the site waned in the ninth century.

The growth of Yaxchilan is often credited to the reign of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III (681-742 CE), who conquered smaller polities and encroached closer to the nearby city of Piedras Negras, leading to wars and tensions between the two city-states. Despite the long history of Yaxchilan, two of its rulers led the polity during its peak occupation: Itzamnaaj Bahlam III and his son, Yaxun Bahlam IV (752-768). Itzamnaaj Bahlam III had three wives, with Ix K'abal Xook (hereafter Lady Xook) serving as his principal wife and, as such, she would have been the mother of his intended successor. His secondary wives were Lady Sak Biyaan and Lady Ik' Skull, the mother of who his actual successor, Yaxun Bahlam IV. As I will argue, Yaxchilan was unique in the presentation of women in its monumental art, even going so far as to include women in ballgame imagery. The unique representation of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III's wives, specifically Lady Xook, will establish a precedent that continued during Yaxun Bahlam IV's reign.

The succession of Yaxchilan rulers was first established by Tatiana Proskouriakoff, who noted a mysterious ten-year interregnum, or period of suspended rulership, after Itzamnaaj Bahlam III's death in 742 CE (Proskouriakoff 1993; Proskouriakoff 2012; Brittenham 2019).

Yaxun Bahlam IV's rulership only lasted roughly 16 years which, comparatively speaking, is significantly shorter when compared to his father's 60-year reign or his grandfather's 40 years. Despite his briefer tenure in power, Yaxun Bahlam IV constructed several pieces of monumental architecture in his own honor and brought Yaxchilan to grandiose heights. This section will explore the stability and interregnum that preceded his rulership, and will question why he turned to ballgame imagery as a way of legitimizing his rule. It will also investigate how Yaxun Bahlam IV's artistic program utilized his relationships with the women around him to further support his rule.

In an effort to combat the cohesion of a singular Maya history, Charles Golden (2010, 374) argues that the perceived reconstruction of history is less of a static linear set of events and more of a public attempt to codify living memory, as is done via public art in the Maya realm. Associated performances, such as ceremonies, would impact the public, contemporary interpretation of the histories as well, reflecting modified histories that served the interests of the commissioner. While there was a political and historical basis for Yaxun Bahlam IV's rulership, the interregnum before his reign suggests instability, which I argue created a need for propaganda and support in the form of construction projects and monumental art. I suggest that the architectural construction campaign at Yaxun Bahlam IV's behest can be seen as a calculated performance of political power utilizing public imagery and ceremony to solidify his authority. He commissioned works that often appropriated the imagery used by his father Itzamnaaj Bahlam III or step-mother Lady Xook and reasserted his own power in their stead. One of these commissions was Structure 33, and its associated Hieroglyphic Staircase. The staircase imagery includes scenes related to the ballgame. The choice of ballgame iconography must have been intended to support his power because these ballgame images worked in tandem with other

monumental works, allowing Yaxun Bahlam IV to successfully reshape the historical narrative during his rule and set his place in Maya history. Whether or not this history was accurate matters less than how he chose to be memorialized. However, before I examine Yaxun Bahlam IV's artistic program and gender relations, we will delve into the unique precedent that Lady Xook's portrayal set.

ITZAMNAAJ BAHLAM III AND LADY XOOK

Coming into rulership during the seventh century, Itzamnaaj Bahlam III maintained power for sixty years. His early rule is less documented, but the final third of his life showcased his triumphs. While construction in Yaxchilan came to a peak during his son Yaxun Bahlam IV's rule, the buildings that Itzamnaaj Bahlam III appointed were also significant. He commissioned new temples, including one dedicated to his military achievements. This temple, known as Structure 44, included lintels that depicted images of his prowess in battle and capture of enemies. Set in front of this building were stelae that further commemorated his military exploits (Tate 1992: 258).

Itzamnaaj Bahlam III did not just focus on himself in his artistic programs. In 726 CE, he commissioned a palace house (Structure 23) on the main plaza dedicated to his wife, Lady Xook. This temple was known and constructed as the queen's house, and Brittenham (2019) in an in-depth analysis of the structure, its associated lintels, and dedicatory glyphs, argues that this building functioned as a show of patronage and piety.[5] Brittenham (2019, 8) believes the

[5] Kathryn Josserand (2007: 300) suggests Structure 23 might have been a dower house, or a home occupied by a widower after her husband's death. Andrea Stone and Marc Zender (2011: 121) posit instead that this temple was a funerary monument to Lady Xook, complete with lintels that she commissioned herself, while Martin and Grube

structure's sculpted lintels were commissioned by Lady Xook, as they display her as the active agent of the rituals shown on them. This building and its artistic program are rare in terms of being dedicated to a woman, supporting Yaxchilan's unusual focus on women in its monumental art. Michelle Rich and Keith Eppich (2020, 89) argue that the artistic program of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III and his son focused on memorializing the bonds they held with local women as well as facilitating their ties with foreign entities. Women, they argue, are vital to this role of alliance building, and that is reflected in these artistic programs.

Three of the lintels, or stone blocks placed horizontally over the entryways into Structure 23, portray a process of bloodletting, ritual, and sacrifice performed by Lady Xook. One of the lintels, Lintel 23, was placed on the side of the building and includes a hieroglyphic inscription that suggests that this was a temple to honor Lady Xook (Brittenham 2019, 19). Two other lintels (Lintels 24 and 25) include high relief images of Lady Xook completing a ritual bloodletting and receiving a vision from the gods. The final lintel, Lintel 26, shows her dressing her husband for battle. Her heavily detailed and embroidered garments in each lintel showcase the level of attention given to this construction, upholding her as a prominent female figure in Yaxchilan society. Between this structure and the likelihood that her son may have been the intended ruler after Itzamnaaj Bahlam III's death, Lady Xook serves as a strong female presence at Yaxchilan even after her husband's death. Lady Xook died in 749, recorded on an inscription in Structure 24. Her birthdate is not recorded, however, the dedicatory inscription on Lintel 25 notes that she was present for Itzamnaaj Bahlam III's accession to the throne.

Lintel 24 (Fig. 12) depicts Lady Xook going through the process of bloodletting. On the right, kneeling before her husband, Lady Xook carefully threads a thorn or obsidian blade

(2008: 126) argue that Itzamnaaj Bahlam III commissioned the structure in her stead; however, the patron matters less than the images and temple itself.

studded rope through her tongue. She wears a long, elaborately detailed (likely embroidered) huipil and a headdress that curls off the plane of sight of the lintel. Blood seeps from her mouth, curling into a design near her elaborate ear spools. Standing in profile facing the right, Itzamnaaj Bahlam III holds a flaming torch above her head, perhaps suggesting that this ritual is occurring at night (Brittenham 2019, 17). At their feet a bowl lays in wait for the planned offering. Her husband is mostly bare, his loincloth and belt carved in higher relief while Lady Xook's clothing is meticulous with geometric shapes repeating throughout her dress. The associated inscription on the underside of Lintel 24 has been mostly destroyed, though it does note that this ritual took place in 709 CE (Brittenham 2019, 19).

In Lintel 25 (Fig. 13) Lady Xook receives a vision through the form of a centipede-like creature emerging from the bloodletting bowl seen in the previous lintel. The creature rises up, taking up most of the compositional space as Lady Xook continues kneeling before it. From the creature's mouth materializes an armed warrior, an ancestor summoned by the ritual bloodletting. They bear a jaguar headdress and shield, as well as a spear. Andrea Stone and Marc Zender (2011, 121) identify Lady Xook's transformation into the warrior goddess Ixik Yohl. The impersonation of deities has a long history in Maya society with evidence found on monuments, ceramics, and translated from glyphic descriptions. The royals would use their divine connection to the gods to manifest the guise of gods and perform rituals (Earley 2019, 16). By transforming into a warrior goddess, Lady Xook is asserting her own sacred and profound link to a deity and emphasizes her status and duty as a royal of Yaxchilan. The glyphic description associated with this lintel notes that this deity conjuring ritual took place during Itzamnaaj Bahlam III's accession in 681 CE (Brittenham 2019, 19-20). The association that this inscription makes is that

Lady Xook was not only present for the accession, but integral to the ritual assuring Itzamnaaj Bahlam III's success.

The final lintel, Lintel 26 (Fig. 14), depicts Lady Xook sending her husband off to battle. She stands to the right of the lintel offering a jaguar helmet to her husband. She wears a long, embroidered garment down to her ankles, though the shallow relief detailing has faded over time. The ear spool that she wears is flared and seamlessly blends into the blood detailing her cheek. Visually, this blood seems to stem from Lintel 24 where Lady Xook's blood is shed in the ritual sacrifice. Itzamnaaj Bahlam III stands to the left, hand held out to receive the jaguar helmet and armor. He bears a dagger, a woven fitted tunic armor, and a loincloth that does not extend past his knees. There are two sets of horizontal glyphs above their heads and if it had not been destroyed, another between the two figures. The glyphs on the underside of the lintel date the carving of this piece to 724 CE; however, the scene represented is identified as occurring forty years prior, during 681 CE as well (Brittenham 2019, 19-20).

This lintel program establishes Lady Xook's importance to Yaxchilan to a significant degree. In every image, Lady Xook is positioned on the right side of the carving, facing to the left. As Joel Palka (2002, 423) has argued, in Maya art, the right side of the body was believed to be the preferred side, with rulers or nobles consistently facing their subordinates on the left. Vázquez López (2017, 16) proposes that in depicting women specifically, the positionality becomes an indicator of status. When considering the epigraphic evidence of the women depicted looking to the right, she confirms that these women outranked their husbands, and as such, facing the right in monumental art may be symbolic of this. However, as noted by Brittenham (2019, 20) and Mallory Matsumoto (2013, 101-103), the textual inscription of Lintel 25 is reversed, implying mirror writing. This mirror writing, according to Matsumoto (2013,

118), could serve as a visual reminder that the events occurring on the lintels are ceremonial and supernatural. The use of mirror text would have connected the viewers to what authority utilized the sacred mirror most often, the elite. The symbolism behind the mirror text encouraged the audience to engage with the imagery on a deeper, more intimate level. Whether or not she is in the dominant position facing left, Lady Xook's lintels are made all the more significant by the portrayal of her threading the thorned rope through her tongue, as she is the one actively completing the ritual work.

If we are to take into account the imagery displayed, as well as the ritual function of the structure, then it becomes evident that Lady Xook held a great deal of power and influence at Yaxchilan. When removed from context and read apart from their hieroglyphic inscriptions, the pieces seem to portray a narrative of sequential events. Conversely, the in-situ placement of the pieces is separate and far enough apart that the viewer would never be able to see all lintels at once. They were placed on the ceiling of the door entrance, requiring the viewer only be able to view them upon entering the building. In actuality and as displayed in Figure 15, the viewer would experience the inscriptions prior to the full lintel and in reverse order, starting with Lintel 26. According to their inscriptions, the events shown on Lintels 25 and 26 take place in the far past, following the ascension of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III and explicitly asserting Lady Xook's prominent role in that. Lintel 24 underscores Lady Xook's achievements through her bloodletting. Lintel 23, a purely glyphic dedication that resides on the other side of the building, celebrates her lineage by recounting the elite Xook line. As part of the distinguished Xook clan, the same clan from which Itzamnaaj Bahlam III's own mother came, Lady Xook was the favored wife of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III, as is also evidenced by the creation and decoration of the structure itself.

Brittenham (2019, 10) sees this lintel program as performative architecture. She suggests that the act of creation and celebration was as integral, if not more important, to the act of dedication as the subsequent act of viewing. In the following rituals and ceremonies, Lady Xook would be honored for her patronage (under the auspices of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III) and piety. The ritual surrounding the construction of the building would cement her political and social power as a figure of great importance. These lintels would not have been accessible for the public to see, but the secondary wives of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III would surely have been able to witness this dedication. The pomp and grandeur of the ceremony upon the building's dedication would have been enough to elevate her status among the general public. Based on this structure and its artistic program, Lady Xook must have served as one of the most notable women in Maya society and one who held power. As Itzamnaaj Bahlam III's principal wife, Lady Xook's child, presuming that she had a son, would be meant to be the succeeding heir, while she herself would have been a daunting figure to follow.

YAXUN BAHLAM IV BEFORE AND IN POWER

Following the death of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III, there was a period of interregnum (742 – 752), where as far as the current archaeological record at Yaxchilan is concerned, there was no ruler in Yaxchilan. However, a panel from Piedras Negras does suggest Yaxchilan had a ruler at this time. The panel depicts a celebration of the anniversary of Itzam K'an Ahk IV's accession in 749, wherein the ruling figure is in the center, surrounded by an audience (Clancy 2009, 158). The associated hieroglyphic text mentions the presence of a lord named Yopaat Bahlam of Yaxchilan, the current ruler during this period of interregnum. Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube

(2008, 127) propose that the lack of a record at Yaxchilan during this period suggests that all evidence of a reigning leader(s) for this time was later purged. Martin (2020, 134-136) supports his argument for a ruler before Yaxun Bahlam IV by examining the relationship between the sites. Piedras Negras was often at odds with Yaxchilan, with many of their rulers vying for political authority without bowing to the nearby site. They would have benefited by accentuating the expunged ruler and undermining Yaxun Bahlam IV's claim of intended rulership. Josserand (2007, 307) argues that Yaxun Bahlam IV faced a rival heir, a half-brother, to his father's throne. She notes that hieroglyphic stairs at the nearby site of Dos Pilas record the capture of a Yaxchilan lord. The glyphs identifying the lord are damaged, but similar enough to the shark head emblem representing the Xook clan. She proposes that this lord was, in fact, Lady Xook's son and heir to the throne, who was captured in an attempt to secure a distinguished captive like his father had before him (Josserand 2007, 307-9). A ruler needed to prove himself a warrior and retrieve a captive or tribute from nearby polities. These tributes he brought would demonstrate his economic power.

Following the intended heir's death, Yaxun Bahlam IV would have to prove his own competence. As Martin (2020, 136) writes, Yaxun Bahlam IV "reset old monuments, had missing or destroyed ones for his grandfather [Yaxun Bahlam III] re-carved, and created a grand dynastic narrative." It is even possible that some of the text on Hieroglyphic Staircase 1, found on Structure 5, was originally a product of his half-brother, Yopaat Bahlam, prior to being obliterated by Yaxun Bahlam IV. It consists of several registers of glyphic inscriptions that record the dynastic history of Yaxchilan, detailing out each ruler, their accomplishments, and lineage. Megan O'Neil (2011, 259) notes that this staircase, along with Structures 12 and 22, were among those that Yaxun Bahlam IV utilized to shape the history of Yaxchilan into one of

continuous success and warfare. Of Yaxun Bahlam IV's first monuments, Stela 11 depicts the captives that he took on in 752. These captives emphasize his success of the same duty at which the heir before him failed.

Yaxun Bahlam IV ascended to the throne in 752 CE. Stela 12 highlights the date of his father's death in 742 CE and the ten-year gap between the two rulers. Once he became ruler, he commissioned an intense propagandistic construction campaign, suggesting a perceived need to establish his dominance over the city he now ruled. He used several motifs to legitimize his reign including ancestral connections and personal achievements. In one of the earliest and most comprehensive texts concerning Yaxun Bahlam IV, Linda Schele and David Friedel (1990, 285) pose a few monuments and events as part of Yaxun Bahlam IV's crusade to support his transition into rulership, including Stela 11. I posit the ballgame imagery served this same purpose as backing for this shift in leadership.

All of the structures that I will be analyzing in this study were commissioned before or just after Yaxun Bahlam IV's ascension to the throne, thus making their construction date all roughly around the same time (Nolan 2015, 99). The inscriptions on the objects all record dates prior to 755 CE, with a few events described to be occurring before Itzamnaaj Bahlam III's death. I have included Table 2 for ease of access to the dates recorded on the objects. The earliest event to be chronicled is on Hieroglyphic Staircase 2, Block VIII while the latest event is seen in the additions to Hieroglyphic Staircase 1 in or around 761 CE.

Stelae 11 and 12, part of the Structure 40 group, are the clearest form of propaganda. While Stela 12 is notable for listing the exact dates of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III's death and Yaxun Bahlam IV's ascension (742 and 752 CE respectively), and thereby marking the interregnum (Josserand 2007, 299), Stela 11 (Fig. 16) displays the flapstaff ritual. The flapstaff ritual was a

sacred ceremony that traditionally observes the movement of the sun, but politically is used with a transfer of power from one ruler to the next (Tate 1992, 94-96). The depiction of this ritual communicates that Itzamnaaj Bahlam III is symbolically passing the ritual, and the throne, to his son. He is asserting through the inscriptions that this ritual occurred in 741 CE, despite the piece being constructed post Itzamnaaj Bahlam III's death, thus Yaxun Bahlam IV is proclaiming his father's approval. In this instance, he is manipulating history to shore up any doubt that there ever was another heir or intention on his father's behalf.

One of the more prominent engagements Yaxun Bahlam IV has with gender is located with Structure 21, a building across a ridge from Structure 33. The proximity of these two structures creates a physical reminder of the connections between Yaxun Bahlam IV and Lady Xook. Just before entering Structure 21, the far more public monument, Stela 35 (Fig. 17), is made apparent in front of the entryway. This piece was commissioned by Yaxun Bahlam IV and depicts his mother, Lady Ik' Skull, identified by the inscription. Standing on block glyphs, a woman faces left and holds a bowl in hand. She wears a long, patterned garment and a larger headdress that extends to the top of the monument. Though it is damaged now, the woman is performing autosacrifice where her blood would drip into the bowl to be used in the ritual. The visual language used asserts Lady Ik' Skull's importance. Portraying Yaxun Bahlam IV's mother as completing this ritual elevates her status and puts her on par with Lady Xook. Her whole body is shown with her face in profile, affording her more compositional space than many Maya women on monumental works. Lady Ik' Skull faces left and the summoned ritual vision emerges from her palm into the space above her. She is the active agent in this piece, not competing for attention amongst others. Despite being from Calakmul, Lady Ik' Skull was not the primary wife of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III and had never been recorded on any monument during her husband's

reign (Tate 1992, 124). By constructing this work of his mother, Yaxun Bahlam IV is disputing her previous lesser status compared to Lady Xook.

A connection with Lady Xook is also seen in the lintels found in this building. Here, Yaxun Bahlam IV appropriates the imagery found in Lady Xook's dedicatory structure (Tate 1992, 199). Lintels 15, 16, and 17 reference Lady Xook's lintels almost exactly with some notable changes. In these lintels Yaxun Bahlam IV appropriates any political or sacred power that Lady Xook had and supersedes it. Replacing his step-mother as the protagonist, Yaxun Bahlam IV leads the bloodletting ceremony in Lintel 17 (Fig. 20). He faces to the left, taking the more dominant stance, and pierces his penis as a form of auto sacrifice as one of his wives, Lady Mut Bahlam of Hix Witz pulls a rope through her tongue (Martin and Grube 2008, 131). This lintel is smaller than Lady Xook's, and the worn garments are less intricate. The vision serpent is similarly mimicked in Lintel 15 (Fig. 18), where another one of Yaxun Bahlam IV's wives, Lady Wak Tuun of Motul de San Jose kneels before the creature and bears the basket with bloodletting knives implying that she is involved in the ritual. It is likely that Yaxun Bahlam IV included two of his wives in order to emphasize those connections he held with different sites and royalty. It also shows that secondary wives are important and is a rebuke to Lady Xook taking precedence in her own lintel series which ignores the other wives.

The final and central lintel represents an entirely different scene when compared to those of Structure 23. Lintel 16 (Fig. 19) displays Yaxun Bahlam IV standing before a captive *sajal*, or secondary elite commander, who bites his hand in fear. Not only is he elaborately dressed with a visible loincloth and headdress, he towers over the captive in a sign of dominance. This lintel corresponds to Lintel 26, where Lady Xook sends her husband off to battle. Yaxun Bahlam IV appropriates Lady Xook's display of military power and exceeds it by incorporating the direct

result of his prowess, the taking of a captive and defeat of another site. Yaxun Bahlam IV takes Lady Xook's place in the dominant position, facing left, and insinuates that he has more authority than she does. While Lady Xook can only send her husband off, Yaxun Bahlam IV can be in combat and take captives.

Yaxun Bahlam IV's wives, represented here by Lady Mut Bahlam and Lady Wak Tuun, are elevated in status by participating in the ceremonial processes. They embody the ties Yaxun Bahlam IV has to nearby kingdoms, links that he has cultivated and that he is bestowing with prestige, thereby supporting his own in the process. It is worth noting that the representations of his wives come as a group, never focusing on a single wife any more than the others. He is presenting the women collectively in their role, as Yaxun Bahlam IV's wives, whereas Lady Xook is the most prominent wife of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III's wives. Yaxun Bahlam IV's own mother was a secondary wife, so by emphasizing his secondary wives, he is legitimizing his mother's status posthumously.

Ultimately, the similarities between Yaxun Bahlam IV and Lady Xook in these lintels are overshadowed by Yaxun Bahlam IV's desire to accumulate more social capital and strengthen his ruling. While these lintels are not as detailed as those with Lady Xook, they are considered to showcase Yaxchilan's affluence at the time (Martin and Grube 2008, 131). He appropriates imagery used by an influential woman and uses his wives to support figures in his own endeavor to prove himself. He is intentionally referencing a specific artistic program, Lady Xook's lintels, and changing them up to assert himself into their messaging. This suggests a preoccupation with his step-mother and her assertions of power, so much so that he created these almost as a response to them.

However, one of the prominent motifs Yaxun Bahlam IV used was ballgame iconography. I suggest that Yaxun Bahlam IV utilizes ballgame iconography as a masculine form of representation to further supplement his rulership, knowing that this motif is inaccessible to women, particularly Lady Xook. Yaxun Bahlam IV commissioned two ballcourts at Yaxchilan. One, Structure 67, is found southeast from Structure 14 and contains no relief imagery. The other, identified as Structure 14, was placed within the grand plaza area. It is centrally located and contained five ballcourt markers, one of which depicted Itzamnaaj Bahlam III (Tate 1992, 62). This marker, identified as an ancestral glyph block, shows that Yaxun Bahlam IV used the ballcourt context to link himself with his father. Ancestral glyph blocks are posthumous representations created by descendants that venerate and draw on their celestial power for whatever ritual they enact. It is heavily deteriorated, with only the ancestral glyph block and Itzamnaaj Bahlam III identifiable on the marker.

Yaxun Bahlam IV further referenced the ballgame in an artistic program far removed from these two courts. He placed images of the ballgame on a Hieroglyphic Staircase located on Structure 33, within the large acropolis area just off of the Grand Plaza. Structure 33 was commissioned by Yaxun Bahlam IV and is positioned across the ridge from Structure 21, the building that houses the lintels imitating his stepmother's lintels. This location is significant as the images are not found within the ballcourt context and therefore do not serve to supplement that ritual.

The stair known as Hieroglyphic Staircase 2 is comprised of thirteen horizontal blocks (Fig. 21). Block VII, which highlights Yaxun Bahlam IV, is located directly in the middle with roughly six blocks to the left and right. The blocks are found on the exterior staircase and are more accessible to the public as they are plainly visible from the ceremonial center. The stair was

excavated in 1975, and the placement of the blocks remain in situ to this day. This study will focus on seven of the thirteen blocks, the three depicting the rulers of Yaxchilan (Blocks VI, VII, and VIII) as well as the four that feature women (Blocks I, II, III, and XI). Blocks VI, VII, and VIII are centered on the staircase and far more visible than the interior of the structure. These highlight the rulers Yaxun Bahlam IV, his father Itzamnaaj Bahlam III, and his grandfather Yaxun Bahlam III. Women are featured on blocks I, II, III, and XI. These women are less visually distinct and are argued to be family of the central rulers. The central blocks are larger, more detailed, and less deteriorated than the rest of the blocks.

The remaining six blocks (IV, V, IX, X, XII, and XIII) display male ballplayers. They are poorly preserved with limited glyphs and details remaining. Nolan (2015, 185) suggests they are sajals or other elite individuals within the Yaxchilan community that have supernatural iconography attached to their costumes. These blocks are simpler than the central blocks depicting the rulers, though they are actively playing the game. Compositionally, they are closer to the rulers as well, a physical barrier between the women and their partners.

Block VI (Fig. 22) features a figure down on one knee, crouching towards a small two-step hieroglyphic staircase. A floating ball is above the steps. It holds an upside-down captive within. The ballplayer, identified in the hieroglyphic text to the right as Itzamnaaj Bahlam III, wears a loincloth, kneepads, and flower decorated sandals. His face is in profile, while the loincloth is very obviously displayed as his body is turned to the viewer. Resting at his waist is a ceremonial bar that leads into a backrack that blends into his headdress. He wears a necklace bearing a face and a large headdress with long quetzal feathers and ornamentation, indicating his importance as a player and ruler. The backrack, difficult to distinguish from his headdress, includes a serpent that Nolan (2015, 237) sees as supernatural. Ultimately, the costume he wears

is the clearest indicator of his masculinity, as his skin is exposed, and the loincloth is fairly prominent.

This image is compositionally mirrored by Block VIII (Fig. 23), where Yaxun Bahlam III, the grandfather of our protagonist, crouches before a hieroglyphic staircase. His face is in profile; however, he is turned with his back facing the viewer. Just above and to the left of the stairs there is a floating ball holding a captive. Yaxun Bahlam III wears an elaborate headdress, a loincloth, and similar sandals to Itzamnaaj Bahlam III, though his ceremonial bar bears a creature within. Nolan (2015, 238-40) once more identifies this as a supernatural reference that demonstrates the ruler's association with cosmic and ritual significance. The iconographical elements that establish his importance further the masculinity of his figure.

Both Yaxun Bahlam III and Itzamnaaj Bahlam III are shown kneeling before a staircase of glyphs that are intricately detailed. As Yaxun Bahlam IV's father, Itzamnaaj Bahlam III takes precedence on Block VI, facing to the left. He wears a protective deflector on his chest while his grandfather, Yaxun Bahlam III, displays his backrack more clearly. This clarity is due to the fact that Yaxun Bahlam III is turned to the right and the viewer sees him from the back. Perhaps the change in positionality is to create a sense of symmetry as the two blocks preceding and succeeding the central group mimic the rulers' poses. Blocks IV, V, and VI all face to the left while Blocks VIII, IX, and X face to the right. No matter the position, the rulers stand before a prisoner-as-ball motif thereby asserting not only prowess at the ballgame but also an ability to secure and dispatch captives. Narratively, these central blocks featuring the rulers assert the strength and prestige of Yaxun Bahlam IV's ancestry.

The images of Yaxun Bahlam III and Itzamnaaj Bahlam III, while prestigious, juxtapose with the representation of the protagonist and patron Yaxun Bahlam IV on Block VII (Fig. 1). He

wears kneepads and sandals similar to his progenitors. The backrack and headdress extend far out beyond his body. The headdress itself is comprised of quetzal feathers and an ornamentation or emblem of a beast at the top. Stone and Zender (2011, 67) identify this costume as Yaxun Bahlam IV impersonating the Water Lily Serpent, another supernatural element. His block contains the most extensive inscriptions of the staircase. Nolan (2015, 177) translates the two sides of the glyphic inscriptions as events that take place across great distances and times, thus he has access to powers and places beyond the normal. Between the inscription and his impersonation of a deity, the allusion that he creates is one of ancient connections and cosmological significance. Yaxun Bahlam IV is recreating a mythological game, manifesting a deity, and crossing temporal boundaries. These iconographical elements express his ability to call on deities and ancestors for aid.

Behind Yaxun Bahlam IV, two dwarves crouch beneath rows of glyphs. Wendy Bacon (2007, 391-393) argues that the dwarf motif was utilized in Maya art to symbolize a sense of liminality, a moment when the temporal and spatial boundaries are subject to negotiation. Dwarves are understood to be unbound to a single plane and occupying space within the natural and supernatural realms. Utilizing these motifs within his imagery, Yaxun Bahlam IV would be further expressing the liminality seen by combining events that his father and grandfather attended. This can also be called collapsing time.

To Yaxun Bahlam IV's left, the captive prisoner is within a large ball that hovers over a staircase, with the glyphs next to them likely indicating their name and place of origin. The prisoner-as-ball artistic motif becomes representative of the sacrificial element of the ballgame, bringing a war sport into the realm of war ritual. As the ballgame becomes a stand in for warfare, the masculinity that is associated with war becomes an imposed aspect of the ballgame as well. It

must be stated that it is only the men that have the prisoner-as-ball motif within their blocks whereas the women do not.

At the top left corner of Block VII, there is a smaller version replicating the scene, complete with a ball and active ballplayer. I posit that the ritual action, or performative action, is as integral to Yaxun Bahlam IV's conception of self in his public image. Hilda Landrove Torres (2020, 116) suggests that this is a reflexivity device used to emphasize the ritualistic nature of the stairway while collapsing the sense of temporality and personhood. Her analysis focuses on ritual action and performance as a central component of the piece and inscriptions. Torres (2020, 117) asserts that the complexity of formal analysis is necessary in interpreting ritual action in association with the persons and events that are depicted. In this case, she argues that the concept of person is both complexified and transformed, where it "may become a replicated reflection of a scaled iteration of the self." In the same vein as Lady Xook's Structure 23 necessitated celebratory activities and those events were more vital to her image than the lintels, Yaxun Bahlam IV's suggestion of sacrificial rituals demonstrates the power he holds. In this instance he is showing that he can reach across time and space. Similarly, the inclusion of his father and grandfather collapses time and space, bringing past events together.

Blocks VI through VIII all display male figures, visually identifiable by their costuming as well as the glyphs inscribed near them. In contrast to the men who dominate the central blocks, four blocks with seated figures display women. Notably, they are portrayed as participating in or observing the ballgame ritual. These monumental images remain the sole depiction of women in association with the ballgame. Even when women associated with the ballgame, it was in support of a male ruler rather than as an active participation in the sport. The identification of these figures come from the decipherment of the associated inscriptions as the

figures are in poor condition as well as nondescript. Their clothing silhouette seem to be huipiles, eroded as they are, not ballgame gear. Many of the identifying glyphs or elements of the scene have been lost to deterioration. These blocks are also simpler, with less ornamentation and script worked into the design. Compositionally, the women are seated to take up less space, fit within the boundaries, and plainly, they are not actively participating in the game. Even compared to the secondary men, they are in active poses to play in the game, whereas the women are seated. The central three blocks (VI, VII, and VIII) are several inches larger and the relief carvings are deeper than the secondary ballplayers and women (Tate 1992, 222). This suggests that the emphasis in these blocks was on the men. Two of the four women hold a rubber ball, while the other two (Blocks II and III) narratively correspond together with supernatural elements.

Block I (Fig. 24) depicts a woman wearing a headdress. She is seated cross-legged and shown in frontal view though her face is in profile, facing towards the right where her hand extends towards a floating ball that hovers over a staircase. The staircase is simple with four steps. The only glyphs that are present on this block are the few behind her, too damaged to be read, and the one within the ball in her hand. Nolan (2015, 159) suggests that the destroyed glyphs on Block I indicates the title sequence of a high ranking royal. She is likely one of Yaxun Bahlam IV's lesser wives, one that did not warrant a more elaborate title sequence. She sits in association with the ball, but is more simply dressed and does not bear any of the same ballgame elements that the central male figures possess.

If Blocks II and III mirror one another, then logically Block XI (Fig. 25) is the complementary figure to Block I. Unsurprisingly, this block is also fairly deteriorated, with any glyphs completely eroded to time and water damage. The woman in this block faces to the left, arms outstretched to the ball that is wedged between the small staircase and an upper register of

glyphs. She sits cross-legged and the faintest outline of feathers behind her suggests that there was once a detailed headdress. She may be another wife of Yaxun Bahlam IV. Individually, this wife is connected to the ballgame in the form of a ball in hand, but she barely touches it. She is seated and stationary. She cannot display any spiritual or ancestral prowess like the other women in her family, and so she is isolated. This seclusion is emphasized by the fact that her block, XI, is much further away from the other women.

The woman on Block II (Fig. 26) sits cross-legged, facing to the right. There are a number of deteriorated glyphs around her, and she wears a headdress. Her arms are close to her torso, hands outstretched to the right and with a bicephalic serpent entwined through them. Nolan affirms that the serpent represents the title of the woman, Lady Pakal, Yaxun Bahlam IV's grandmother (Nolan 2015, 160). She is his paternal grandmother and wife of Yaxun Bahlam III (Martin and Grube 2008, 122). Following Ian Graham's drawings of the inscriptions, Nolan asserts that Lady Pakal is manifesting primordial waters, implying that even beyond the grave she could participate in ritual events. Lady Pakal's female gender is clearly marked through her dress, as her garment almost fully covers her torso and arms. Interestingly enough, there are no direct ballgame aspects associated with her singular block, so while she is connected through the holistic structure, she is isolated from the game. The isolation may be due to this being the closest the blocks could get to symmetry, her status as a secondary wife, or narratively, her block may be explained in the lost glyphs. Considering the central blocks take place over different times, hers might be correspond to the blocks that she is near. Alternatively, she may just be less important than the wife depicted on Block I and her block was moved in an attempt at symmetrical placement.

The woman on Block III (Fig. 27) mimics the pose of Lady Pakal, facing to her left in complementary response. Deteriorated glyphs surround her and a serpent's maw winds out from her hand, seemingly meeting the creature from Block II. This block is in worse condition, with the glyphs entirely eroded and the upper half of the woman illegible. Scholars suggest that the glyphs are indicating the action of receiving, perhaps the ball in ritual ceremony (Freidel et. al 1993, 356; Nolan 2015, 163). Given the narrative parallel with the previous block, Nolan suggests that this figure is also dead, manifesting similar primordial waters, and from there postulates that she could be Lady Ik' Skull, Yaxun Bahlam IV's mother (Nolan 2015, 207-209). This is most likely the case considering the previous monuments, Stela 35 and Lintel 32, that Yaxun Bahlam IV created to honor his mother, raising her status when his father did not depict her in any artistic representations (Josserand 2007, 299). Similar to Lady Pakal, Lady Ik' Skull does not display any ballgame iconography and is more narratively connected to her family. Neither Lady Pakal nor Lady Ik' Skull are depicted playing the game, rather they are shown as ancestral visions. Considering both Itzamnaaj Bahlam III and Yaxun Bahlam III are dead by this time and yet still shown as playing the game, gender may be the crucial difference here.

A comparison of the women holding balls with the men participating in the game indicates that the posture of the women is more contained. These two blocks depict two of Yaxun Bahlam IV's wives. If they had name glyphs, the indicators have deteriorated to time. These women sit on the margins of the scenes, in association with the ballgame and ritual, but are seated rather than participating. While not specific to Mesoamerican sports, Annemarie Farrell et. al (2011, 199) dissect women's role in sport spectatorship and consumption, arguing that social and familial expectations facilitated their experiences. On Blocks I and XI, these

women are seated rather than actively engaging with the game and as such, I posit that they are here as that form of spectatorship, promoting their husband's endeavors.

These women are not there to showcase their own talents or power, rather they are the support and witness to Yaxun Bahlam IV's throne and enhance his power. He reasserts his masculinity in the details of his glyphic descriptions and the poses of action, while the women are only present for their association. As Schele and Freidel (1990, 295) note, "the high king's performance of public ritual affirmed the legitimacy of his power and gained public support for his decisions." Wives are an extension of this ritual. The blocks on Hieroglyphic Staircase 2 are evidence of Yaxun Bahlam IV's campaign and the methods that he used to shore up support. These women are spectators to the game, brought in by their connection to the ruling family. The two wives of Yaxun Bahlam IV serve as tangible links to their families and polities.

Harrison-Buck (2021, 582) proposes a methodology, reciprocal gift economy, that takes marriages as an exchanged good that forms a tie between warring communities. Her relational economy model emphasizes social relations and dissects how a gift economy could be could include forms of sacrifice and asymmetrical exchanges between three parties. Applying this model could deconstruct the hierarchical importance and uplift social arrangements, like marriage. It would also reconsider how women in these marriages would have agency, rather than devaluing them as props in political events. Similarly, Martin (2020, 190-195) analyzes the partnerships occurring within Yaxchilan. Unlike his father, Yaxun Bahlam IV chose to not only identify his heir within his own lifetime, but also utilized his artistic program to boast of the connections he had with all of his wives. He sustained a connection to all of his foreign wives, elevating their status from marital conquests to one of prominence. In light of this analysis, these women are presented at the ballgame ritual in support of Yaxun Bahlam IV's own rulership.

Unlike his father, Yaxun Bahlam IV chose to identify his heir within his own lifetime, something that was uncommon. This heir was identified on one of the final monuments Yaxun Bahlam IV commissioned. As Martin (2020, 194) comments, the artistic program of Yaxun Bahlam IV's son, Itzamnaaj Bahlam IV, suggests "that anxiety over the rightful descent between grandfather and father persisted." This indicates that Yaxun Bahlam IV was crafting his commissions in response to this dispute and that it continued even into his son's reign. Elevating his secondary wives might have also functioned as a preventative measure to avoid repeating the dilemma that occurred with his mother's obscurity.

Yaxun Bahlam IV was likely not the intended heir to the throne in Yaxchilan, as suggested by his artistic program. He responded to the unique precedent set by his father, Itzamnaaj Bahlam III, and father's principal wife, Lady Xook, to depict his wives more prominently, even in association with the masculine ballgame. However, Yaxchilan may be an outlier, portraying women in association with the ballgame, they are not able to truly be a part of the game or wield the items akin to a male ruler or player. Their images are used to support his connections to foreign polities and families. Yaxun Bahlam IV makes it apparent that the ballgame is an icon of power within society and one that he can readily use, but that his wives and relatives cannot.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has considered images of the Maya ballgame as masculine discourse. Ceramic vessels, figurines, murals, and monumental works display similar ballgame iconography with the distinct lack of women actively participating in the game. Costume elements such as loincloths, padding, and yokes all indicate the relation to the ballgame with a list of male figures bearing these iconographical aspects. If the ballgame was gendered male, then the iconography of the ballgame can be used to demonstrate gender dynamics within Maya society. While elite women in Maya art were sometimes shown with items typically associated with men, such as shields and captives, they were only portrayed with items associated with the ballgame in one known instance. These unique images were created at Yaxchilan, a site with a unique history of promoting royal women. They were commissioned by Yaxun Bahlam IV and provide an effective case study in how rulers constructed their public personas in Classic period Maya society.

The perceived dynamic between Yaxun Bahlam IV and his father's principal wife Lady Xook is one at odds with each other. Lady Xook, as the principal wife of Yaxun Bahlam IV's father, likely had a son that would have been the intended heir. Based on her artistic program, she must have held a great deal of power at Yaxchilan. Yaxun Bahlam IV would not have originally been heir to the throne having been born to a lesser wife, and in turn needed to appropriate some of that power and imagery to make up for his supposed disadvantage once he ascended to the throne.

The centrality of his constructions in Yaxchilan's ceremonial center and the imagery used to represent himself creates a focus on his authority. The iconographical elements that he utilizes on the hieroglyphic staircase position him as a powerful figure; the Water Lily Serpent, the pose,

the glyphic scripture, the central placement. The image of Yaxun Bahlam IV and his male ancestors – his father and grandfather – actively playing the game create a clear contrast with the included women who are not there as their own figures, but as support for Yaxun Bahlam IV. They serve as spectators for the ritual of the ballgame and tangible links to their families and polities. As representatives of marital ties to Yaxchilan, these women are promoted on a significant monumental work that emphasizes Yaxun Bahlam IV's qualities and masculinity. Yaxun Bahlam IV constructed many monuments, but the Hieroglyphic Stair at Structure 33 was clearly one of his most significant undertakings. That he used ballgame imagery so prominently here is telling. He must have believed that his mastery of the game would have boosted his reputation. This staircase, in combination with the lintels and stelae that he produced and in which he appropriated his father and Lady Xook's imagery, reveals that Yaxun Bahlam IV utilized visual language to communicate a vision of himself as a legitimate ruler.

This thesis reevaluates the Maya ballgame through the lens of gender. By deconstructing the apparent default categories, such as masculinity, we can better understand the Maya through the performance of gender and politics. These careful considerations also lend themselves to understanding propaganda and the perception of history when left with limited access to items and historical records. Gender discussions nuance the field and bring it into an age of intersectionality.

RULER	ALSO KNOWN AS	YEARS	WORK ASSOCIATED
YAXUN BAHLAM III	Bird Jaguar III	629 - 669 CE roughly	HS 2; Block VIII
ITZAMNAAJ BAHLAM III	Shield Jaguar III	681 – 742 CE	Structures 23, 44 HS 2; Block VI
INTERREGNUM	Possibly: Yopaat Bahlam II, Aj Tzik, Lady Xook	742 – 752 CE	Piedras Negras Panel 3
YAXUN BAHLAM IV	Bird Jaguar IV	752 – 768 CE	Structures 21, 33; Stelae 11, 12, 35; HS 1 & HS 2
ITZAMNAAJ BAHLAM IV	Shield Jaguar IV	769 – 800 CE Roughly	

Table 1. Table detailing the Yaxchilan rulers relevant to this study.

MONUMENT	DATE REFERENCED ON WORK
HS2 - BLOCK VIII	636 CE
STELA 11	741 CE (Flapstaff ritual) 752 CE (Captives)
STELA 35	741 CE
HS2 - BLOCK VI	743 CE
HS2 – BLOCK VII	744 CE
STELA 12	752 CE
STRUCTURE 21 - LINTEL 16	752 CE
STRUCTURE 21 – LINTEL 17	752 CE
STRUCTURE 21 – LINTEL 15	755 CE
HS1	761 CE
STRUCTURE 14	Not Dated
STRUCTURE 67	Not Dated
HS2 – BLOCKS I, II, III, & XI	Not Dated

Table 2. Table detailing the recorded dates of Yaxchilan Structures and Monuments.

FIGURES

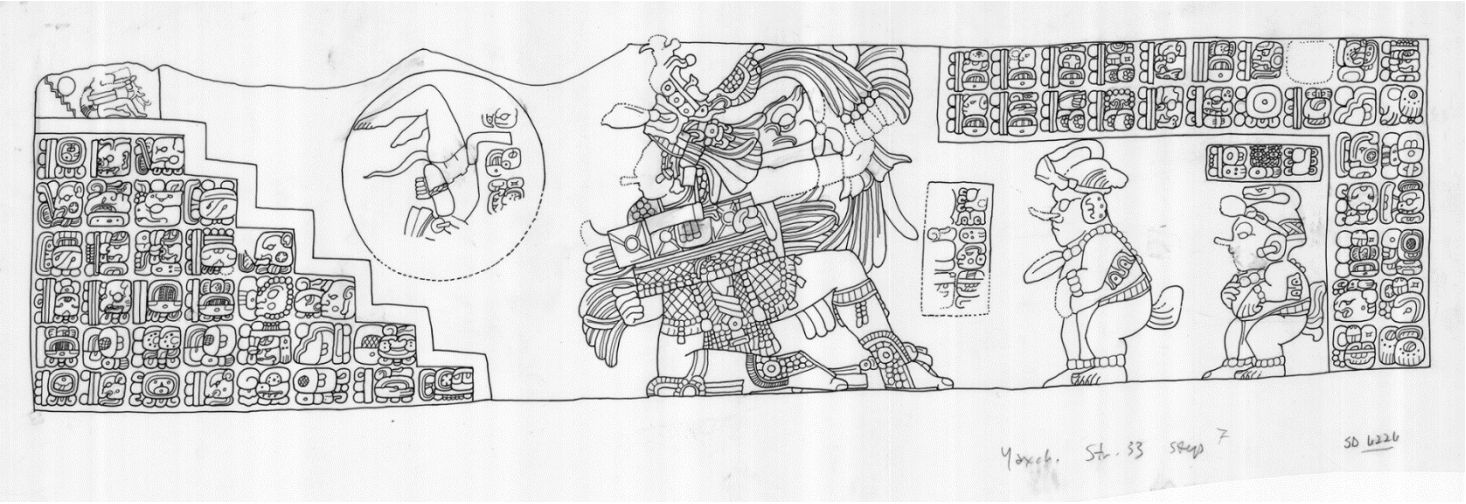

Figure 1**.** Hieroglyphic Stair 2 Block VII, Yaxchilan, drawing by Linda Schele © David Schele, photo courtesy Ancient Americas at LACMA (ancientamericas.org), object number SD-6226.

Figure 2. Oval Palace Tablet, Palenque, drawing by Linda Schele © David Schele, photo courtesy Ancient Americas at LACMA (ancientamericas.org), object number SD-143.

Figure 3. Stela 34, El Perú-Waka’, 692 CE, Cleveland Museum of Art, object number 1967.29.

Figure 4. Ballgame vessel scene, 700 – 800 CE, 23 x 17.5 cm, Saint Louis Art Museum, object number 216:1979.

Figure 5. Cylindrical vessel with ball game scene, 682 – 701 CE, 20 × 15.88 × 15.88 cm, rollout image courtesy of Dallas Museum of Art, object number 1983.148.

Figure 6. Ballplayer Figurine, 600 – 800 CE, h. 34.2 cm., w. 17.8 cm., d. 11.8 cm, Princeton University Art Museum, Museum purchase Fowler McCormick, object number 1998-36.

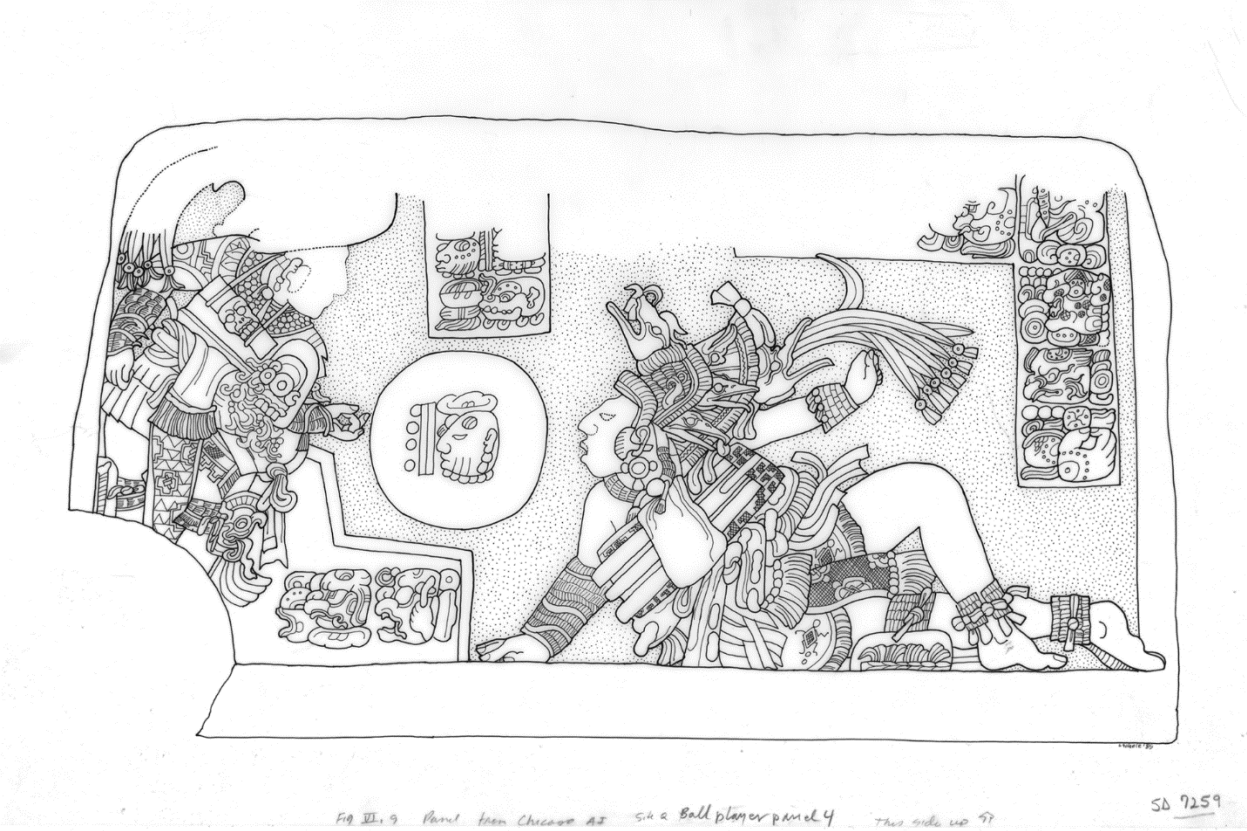

Figure 7. Ballgame Panel, La Corona (Art Institute of Chicago), 600 – 800 CE, drawing by Linda Schele © David Schele, photo courtesy Ancient Americas at LACMA (ancientamericas.org), object number SD-7259.

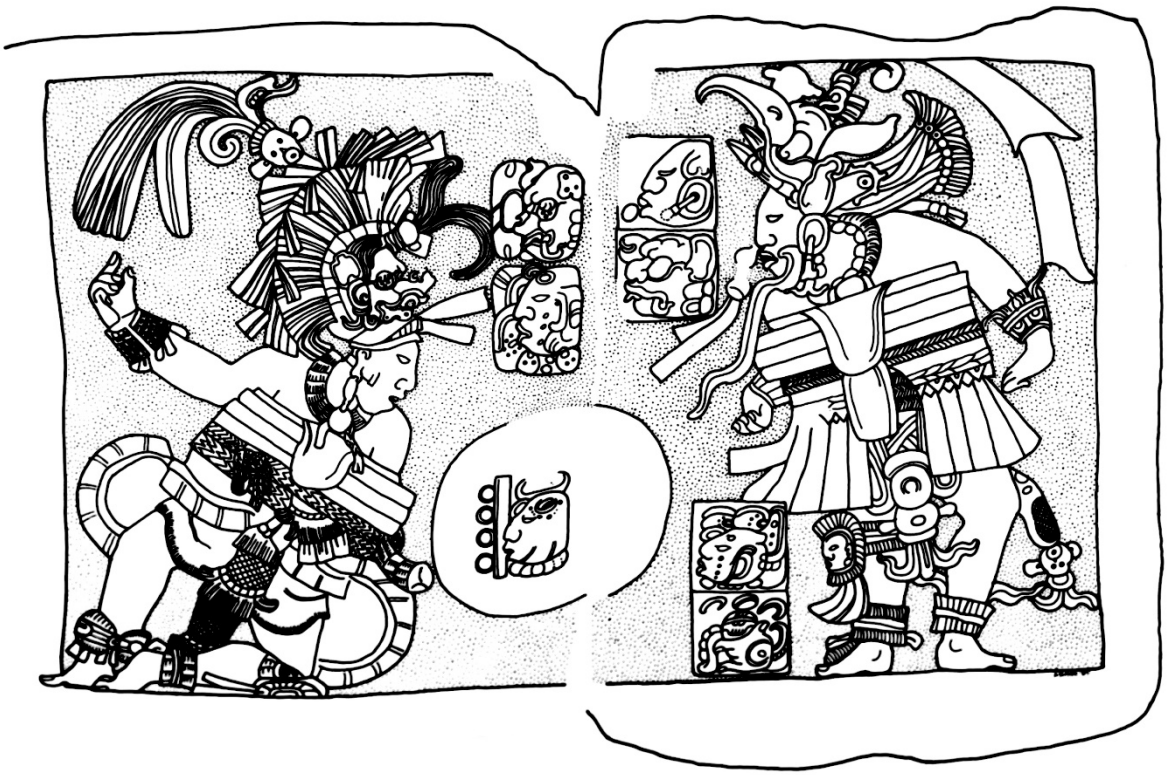

Figure 8. Ballgame Panels, La Corona (Museum of the American Indian and Jay I. Kislak Collection, Library of Congress), 600 – 800 CE, drawing by Linda Schele © David Schele, photo courtesy Ancient Americas at LACMA (ancientamericas.org), object number SD-7261.

Figure 9. Center secondary ball court marker, Copan, image courtesy of Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, object number 58-34-20/49727.

Figure 10. Stela F, Copan, Image courtesy of Benson Latin American Studies and Collections, The University of Texas at Austin, local identifier 07-02523.

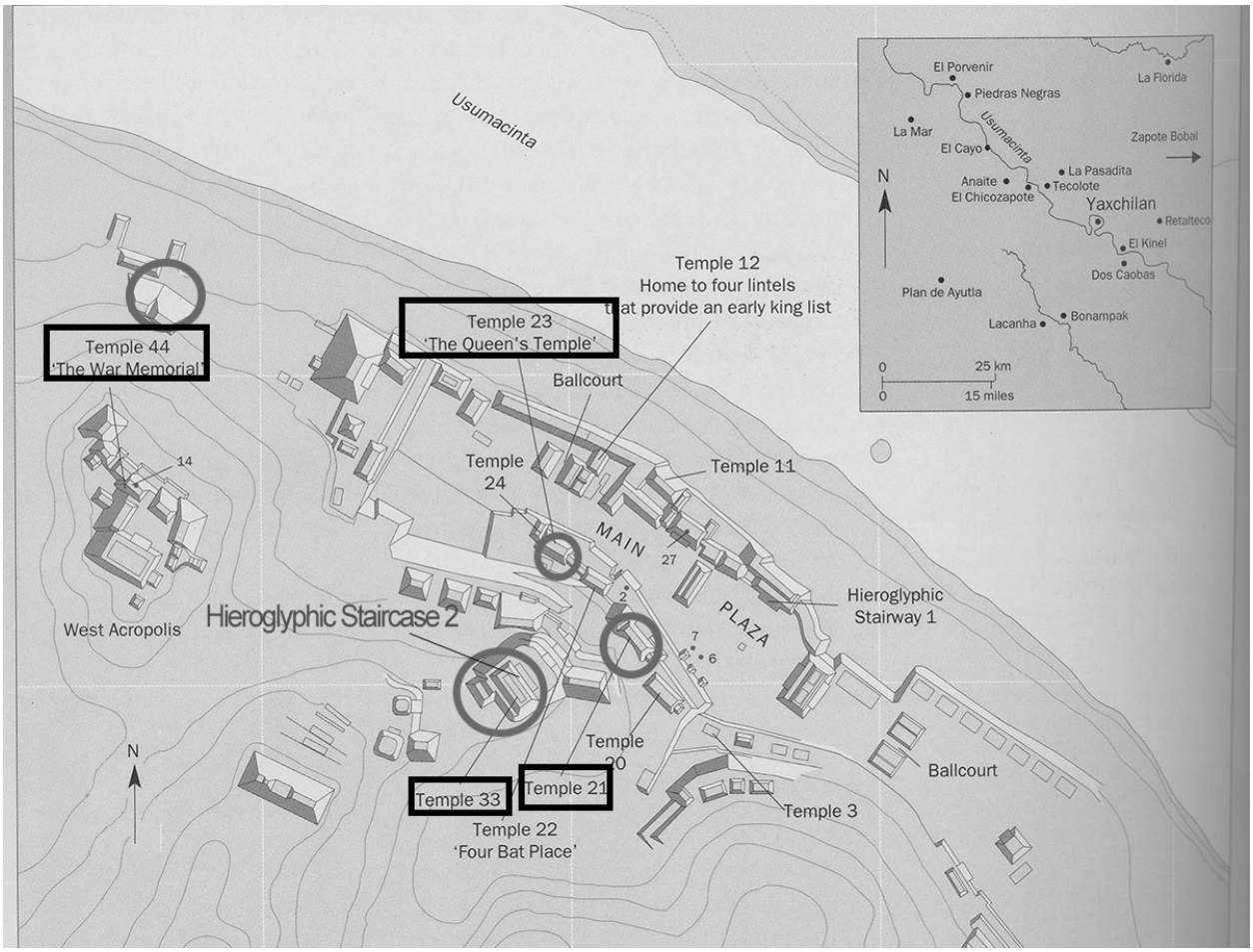

Figure 11. Site map of Yaxchilan, with Structures 21, 23, 33, and 44 highlighted (diagram by Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube, "Yaxchilan," in *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens* [London: Thames and Hudson, 2008]).

Figure 12. Lintel 24, Yaxchilan, 725 – 760 CE, The British Museum, object number Am1923,Maud.4.

Figure 13. Lintel 25, Yaxchilan, 725 – 760 CE, The British Museum, object number Am1923,Maud.5.

Figure 14. Lintel 26, Yaxchilan, 725 – 760 CE, Museo Nacional de Antropología.

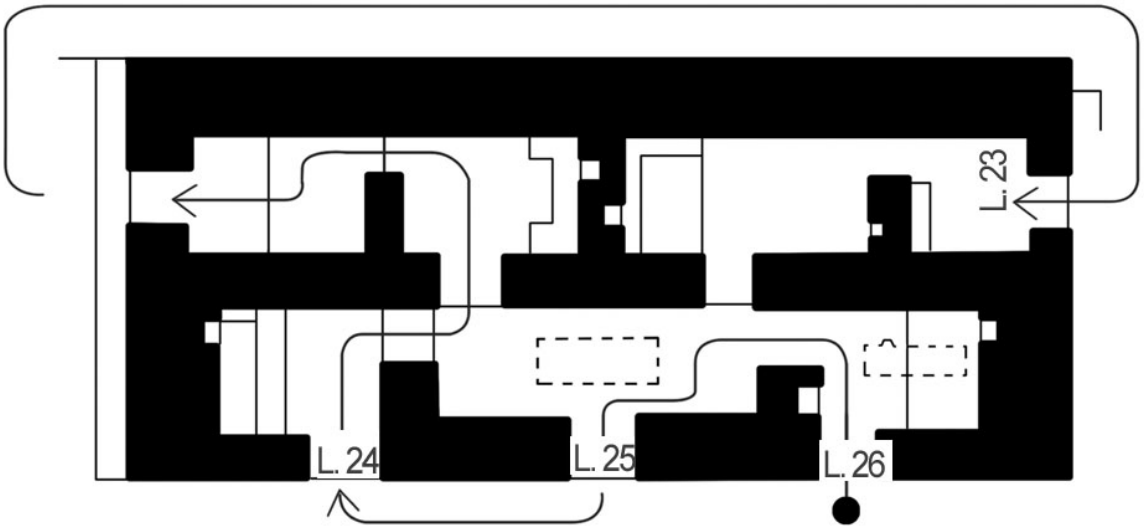

Figure 15. Plan of Structure 23, Yaxchilan, proposed itinerary through the building (diagram by Theodore Watler, after Roberto García Moll, "Itzamnaaj Bahlam III and Structure 23 at Yaxchilan," in *Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya*, ed. Mary Ellen Miller and Simon Martin [San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004]).

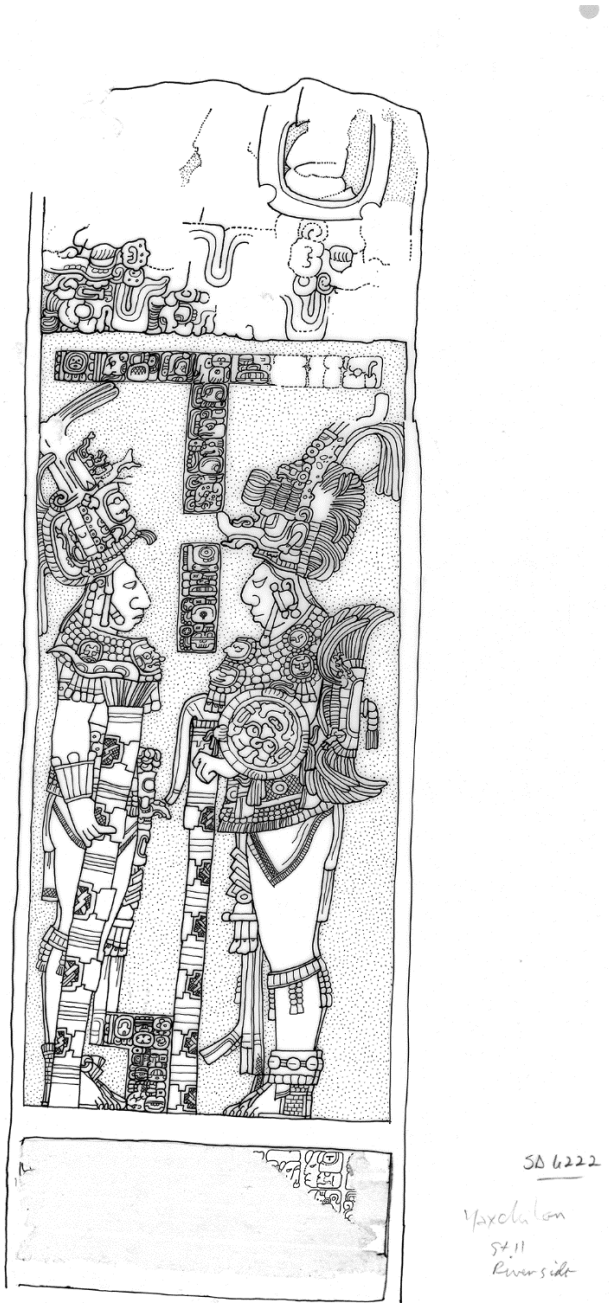

Figure 16. Stela 11, Yaxchilan, 746 CE, drawing by Linda Schele © David Schele, photo courtesy Ancient Americas at LACMA (ancientamericas.org), object number SD-6222.

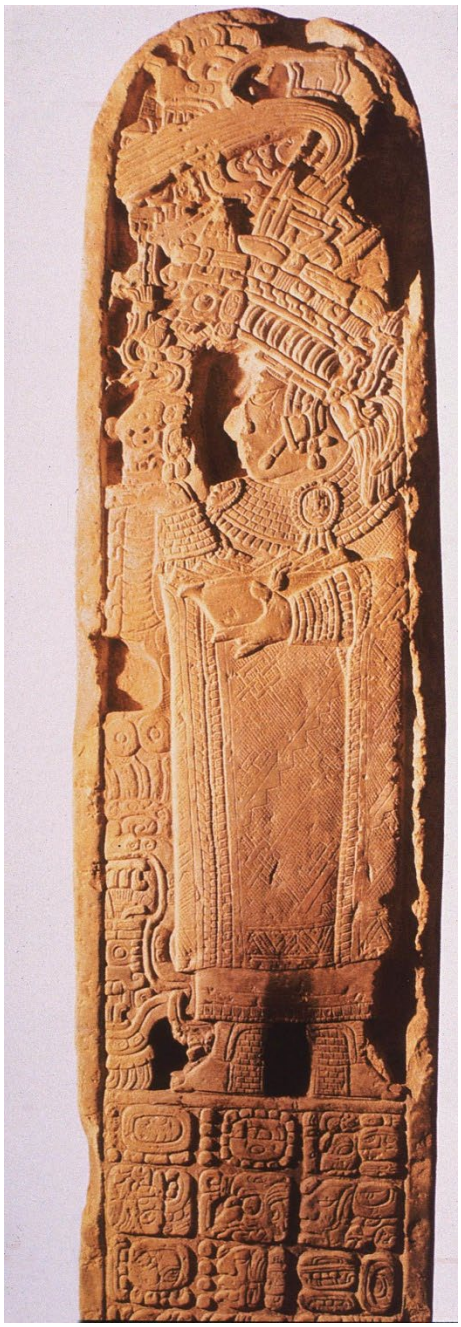

Figure 17. Stela 35, Yaxchilan, 740 – 760 CE, image courtesy of University of California, San Diego.

Figure 18. Lintel 15, Yaxchilan, 760 – 780 CE, The British Museum, object number Am1923,Maud.1.

Figure 19. Lintel 16, Yaxchilan, 760 – 780 CE, The British Museum, object number Am1923,Maud.2.

Figure 20. Lintel 17, Yaxchilan, 760 – 780 CE, The British Museum, object number Am1923,Maud.3.

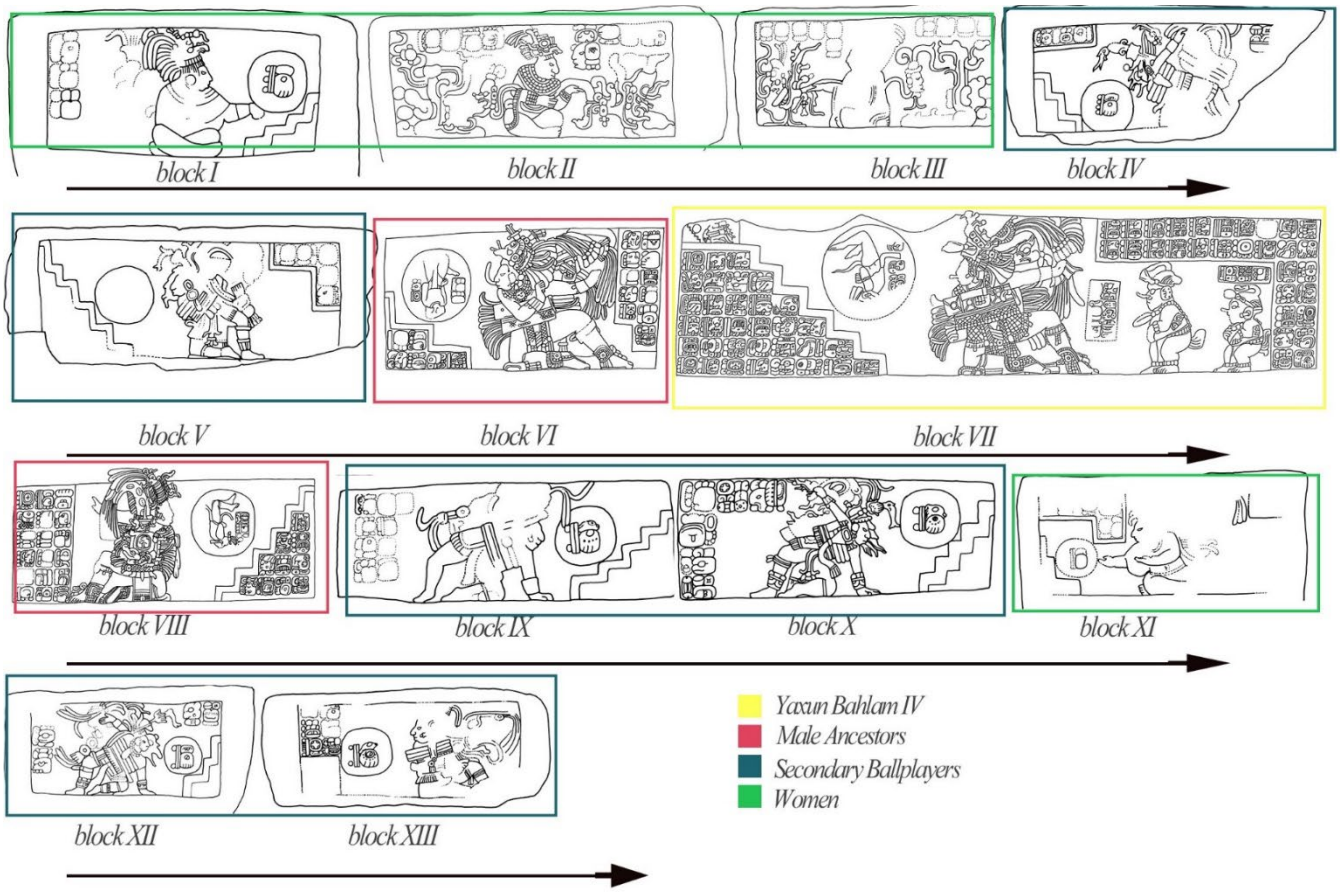

Figure 21. Hieroglyphic Stair 2, Yaxchilan, drawings by Linda Schele © David Schele, photo courtesy Ancient Americas at LACMA (ancientamericas.org), compilation by author.

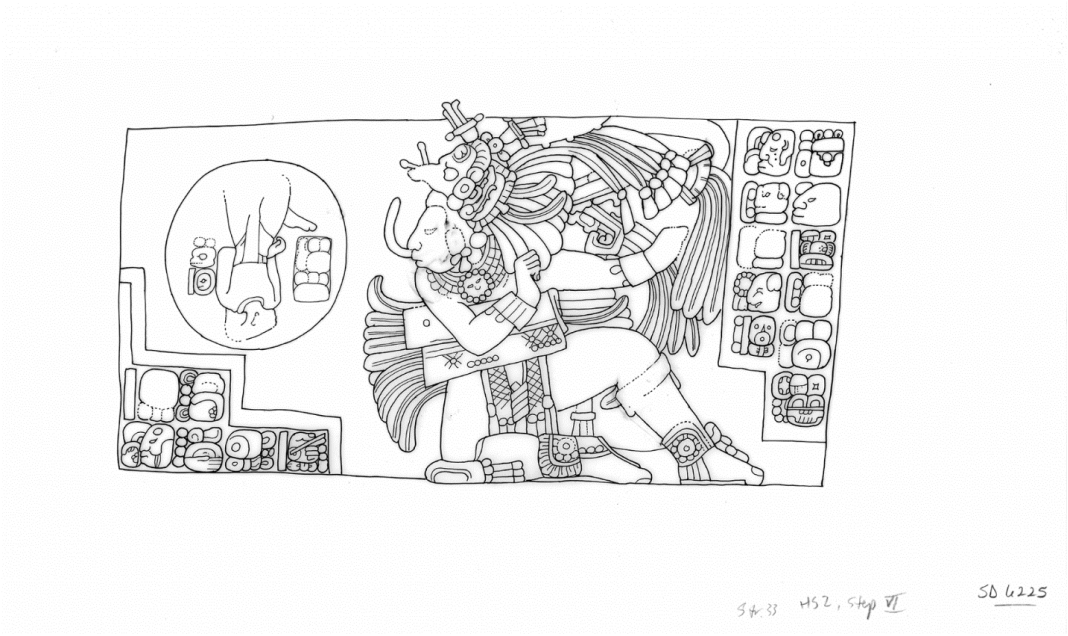

Figure 22. Hieroglyphic Stair 2 Block VI, Yaxchilan, drawing by Linda Schele © David Schele, photo courtesy Ancient Americas at LACMA (ancientamericas.org), object number SD-6225.

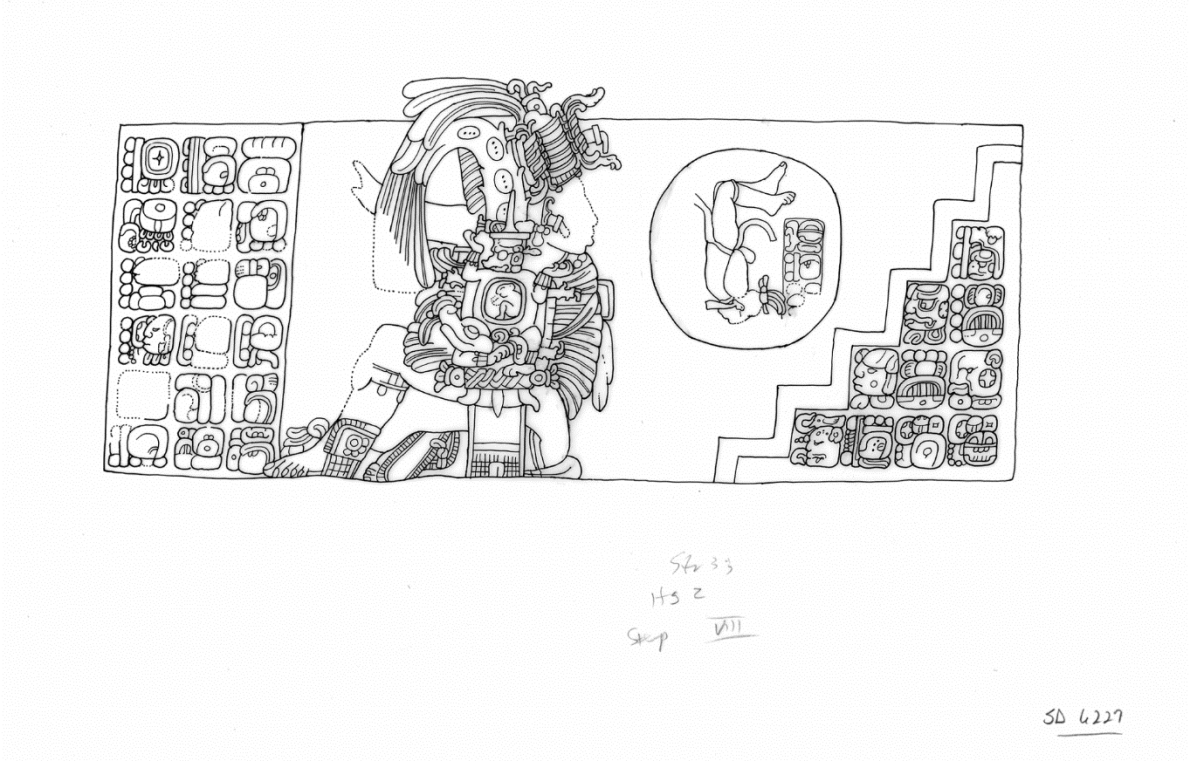

Figure 23. Hieroglyphic Stair 2 Block VIII, Yaxchilan drawing by Linda Schele © David Schele, photo courtesy Ancient Americas at LACMA (ancientamericas.org), object number SD-6227.

Figure 24. Hieroglyphic Stair 2 Block I, Yaxchilan, drawing by Linda Schele © David Schele, photo courtesy Ancient Americas at LACMA (ancientamericas.org), object number SD-7009.

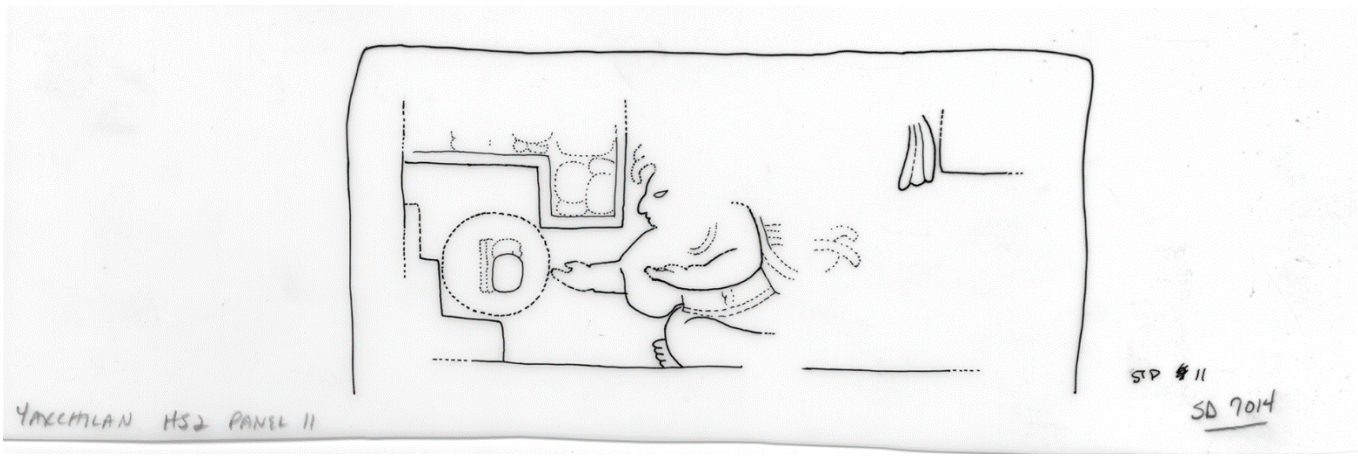

Figure 25. Hieroglyphic Stair 2 Block XI, Yaxchilan, drawing by Linda Schele © David Schele, photo courtesy Ancient Americas at LACMA (ancientamericas.org), object number SD-7014.

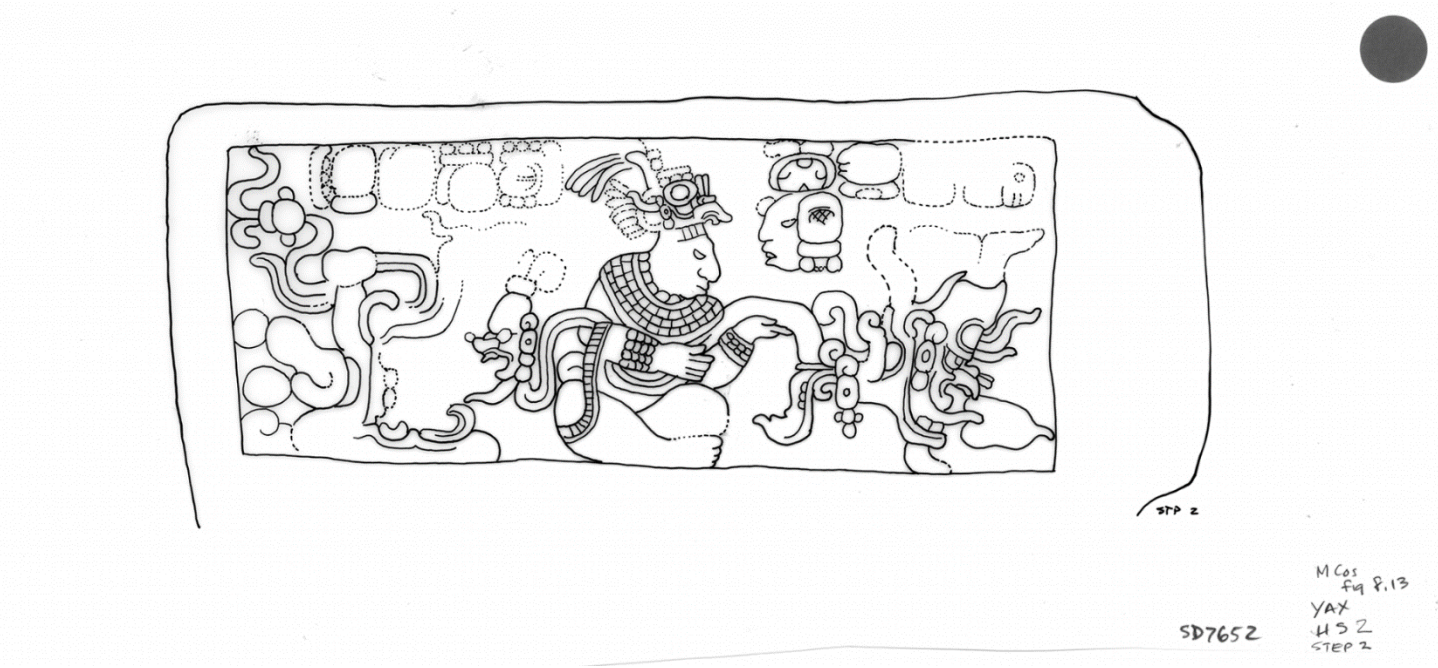

Figure 26. Hieroglyphic Stair 2 Block II, Yaxchilan, drawing by Linda Schele © David Schele, photo courtesy Ancient Americas at LACMA (ancientamericas.org), object number SD-7652.

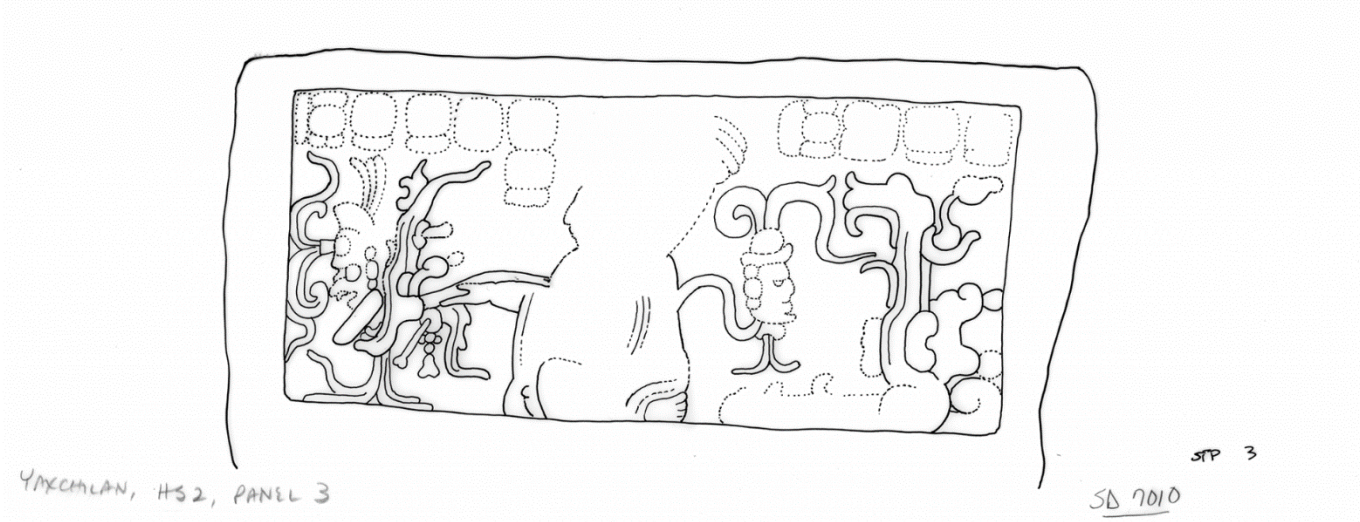

Figure 27. Hieroglyphic Stair 2 Block III, Yaxchilan, drawing by Linda Schele © David Schele, photo courtesy Ancient Americas at LACMA (ancientamericas.org), object number SD-7010.

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ABSTRACT

GENDERING MAYA BALLGAME IMAGERY

by

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Bachelor of Arts, 2020

University of Texas at San Antonio

Lori Boornazian Diel, PhD

This thesis explores ballgame imagery to show that the Maya ballgame was gendered male through a connection of masculine identifiers, depictions, and power. It shows that the Maya ballgame was gendered as masculine and in so doing will lend itself to closer consideration of female presence, or lack thereof, in some facets of Maya politics and society. This becomes clear through an analysis of ballgame imagery at Yaxchilan, where monumental depictions of the ballgame serve to legitimize the ruler's authority through its masculine discourse. As I argue, the emphasis on the ballgame at Structure 33 also promotes Yaxun Bahlam IV's power via his masculinity. I negotiate a space within Maya scholarship to reevaluate the default category of male and masculine that have so far been taken at face value and seen as unremarkable.