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Dedicated to  
the memory of  
Michael D. Coe  
(1929-2019)

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## Yaxchilan from the Perspective of Guatemala: New Data on Settlement, Fortifications, and Sculptural Monuments

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In this paper we offer an update and synthesis of what is currently known regarding the settlement, fortifications, and monuments found in the portion of the Classic period Maya kingdom of Yaxchilan that lies within the modern borders of Guatemala. The settlement, defenses, and sculpture pertain primarily to the reigns of Shield Jaguar III, Bird Jaguar IV, and Shield Jaguar IV, from c. AD 680–810 of the Late Classic period. At this time the Yaxchilan rulers extended the physical borders of their kingdom to the north, west, and east into what is today the Sierra del Lacandon National Park (Parque Nacional Sierra del Lacandón, or PNSL) in Guatemala. The spatial extent of these rulers' authority east of the Usumacinta River is evidenced primarily by the location of carved monuments bearing images and texts that depict the kings (Martin and Grube 2008; Mathews 1988; Schele 1991:78). Their images are shown on lintels and other carved stones located within hinterland settlements that were governed by *sajal* loyal to Yaxchilan, while material remains recovered over the course of excavations provide a further line of evidence that rural communities conceived of themselves as part of the larger Yaxchilan polity (Golden and Scherer 2006, 2013; Golden, Scherer, Muñoz, and Vásquez 2008).

The earliest publication of Yaxchilan-affiliated monuments in Guatemala was

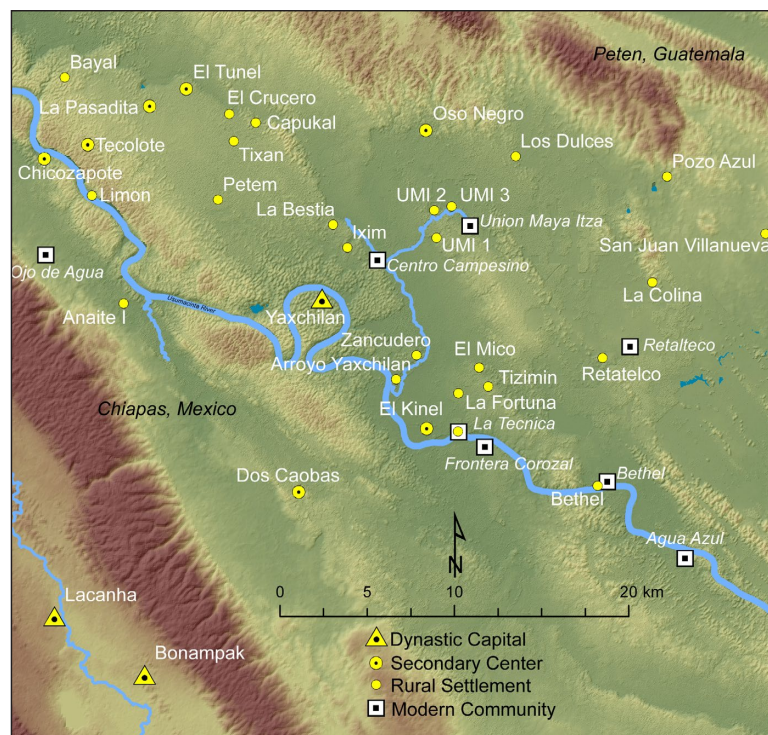
the fantastical adventure story of Dana and Ginger Lamb ([1951]1984). Embedded within this largely fictionalized account were visits made by Dana Lamb and his Mexican travel companions to a yet-unknown site in Guatemala (likely to the east or southeast of La Pasadita) that was the source of at least two looted monuments from the reign of Shield Jaguar IV that are now held in private collections (Scherer et al. 2017). Ian Graham (2010:453-467) was the first professional fieldworker to visit and document Yaxchilan-affiliated sites in Guatemala. Graham, led by local guides and accompanied by Martine Fettweis on later trips to La Pasadita, was drawn by reports of monuments being looted at La Pasadita and Tecolote. More recently, Paulino Morales and Carmen Ramos (Morales 2000; Morales and Ramos 2002) undertook a reconnaissance of sites near the town of La Técnica, mapping settlement and together with Hector Escobedo (2001) providing the initial documentation of a Yaxchilan-style stela at El Kinel.

Beyond these initial forays, the bulk of the research concerning settlement in Guatemala that was once subject to the dynasty of Yaxchilan has been conducted by members of our research team. Begun in the late 1990s, this work has involved reconnaissance, mapping, and excavation of sites in and around the PNSL. Regional explorations began initially as part of

the Piedras Negras Archaeology Project, led by Stephen Houston and Escobedo, including a foray to La Pasadita (Golden 2003). Regional survey, though, was undertaken in earnest beginning from 2003 to 2010 under the auspices of the Proyecto Regional Arqueológico Sierra del Lacandón, initiated by Golden and Scherer in collaboration with A. René Muñoz (Golden et al. 2004; Golden et al. 2010; Golden et al. 2006, 2008; Golden et al. 2003; Scherer et al. 2007; Vásquez et al. 2005). After a pause in research in Guatemala of several years, investigations resumed in 2016 under the auspices of the Proyecto Paisaje Piedras Negras-Yaxchilan, directed first by Griselda Pérez Robles and currently directed by Mónica Urquizú (Pérez Robles et al. 2016; Urquizú et al. 2017).

The earliest investigation of the kingdom of Yaxchilan by our research collective was completed by Golden and colleagues during a brief expedition to the site of La Pasadita in 1998 (Golden 2003; Golden et al. 1999). Beginning in 2003 we began a more intensive investigation of ancient settlement in Guatemala with a focus on understanding the political and social landscape of the hinterlands of the neighboring Yaxchilan and Piedras Negras kingdoms. A number of publications have resulted from those efforts, focused especially on the northern border of the Yaxchilan polity (Golden and Scherer 2006; Golden et al. 2005; Houston, Golden, Muñoz, and Scherer 2006), as well as ancient communities closer to Yaxchilan itself (Houston, Escobedo, Golden et al. 2006; Scherer et al. 2014). All of these data figure prominently in our own interpretations of community and kingdom within the polity of Yaxchilan (Golden and Scherer 2013; Golden, Scherer, Muñoz, and Vásquez 2008). In 2008, our final year of research focused largely on Yaxchilan-affiliated settlements in Guatemala, we undertook mapping and excavations at the site of Tecolote, once home to a border lord who served the interests of the Yaxchilan king. In addition to studies of architecture in the site core, our investigations focused on the documentation of its associated defensive system (Scherer and Golden 2009, 2014a).

While our research in Guatemala continued until 2010, growing concerns about security as well as the expansion of research efforts into neighboring areas of Chiapas, Mexico, resulted in a hiatus for investigations in the PNSL. In 2016 and 2017, however, we resumed archaeological fieldwork in Guatemala, focused chiefly on evidence for economy and warfare at Piedras Negras, the results of which are currently being



**Figure 1.** The location of sites discussed in this text, including new sites identified during the 2016 and 2017 field seasons of research (map by Charles Golden).

prepared for publication. During those field seasons, we also briefly conducted survey in the southern portion of the PNSL, in areas immediately adjacent to the polity capital of Yaxchilan and extending towards the northern border of the kingdom. In years prior, much of this zone was inaccessible due to an illegal occupation surrounding Centro Campesino, Guatemala, immediately across the Usumacinta River from the urban core of Yaxchilan. That settlement has since been abandoned and an official park ranger station is now maintained there by CONAP (Consejo Nacional de Áreas Protegidas) and the Defensores de la Naturaleza.

In 2016 and 2017 the identification of new settlements and other anthropogenic features in the kingdom of Yaxchilan was accomplished through opportunistic pedestrian survey (Figure 1). GPS coordinates were recorded for each anthropogenic feature and brief notes were taken. Additional systematic survey is needed to fully understand settlement in the kingdom of Yaxchilan, ideally utilizing pedestrian survey in combination with remote sensing techniques such as lidar and total station mapping. Nevertheless, the preliminary results reported here contribute to our understanding of the general pattern of settlement in the kingdom. We also present new information gathered regarding the distribution of fortifications in the kingdom of Yaxchilan. Finally, we update and clarify the original location of monuments that have originated from this zone. This article offers only a preliminary assessment of the study zone, and we anticipate that future research on the ground or via remote sensing campaigns will build on these findings.



**Figure 2.** The location of settlement and defensive walls at Yaxchilan-Guatemala (map by Charles Golden).

### Settlement

The settlement located immediately across the river from the monumental core of Yaxchilan is identified here as Yaxchilan-Guatemala (Figure 2). Our reconnaissance also located five new settlement clusters beyond this zone: Centro Campesino, Ixim, La Bestia, El Crucero, and Petem. Of these, Centro Campesino and Ixim could simply be considered outlying settlement from the Yaxchilan core. However, since the GPS coordinates form two distinct clusters we have chosen to treat them as separate sites here. We also include observations made at La Pasadita.

### Yaxchilan-Guatemala

As anyone who has visited Yaxchilan knows, the Main Plaza consists of a long narrow expanse of flat terrain immediately adjacent to the bank of the Usumacinta River in Chiapas. Much of the surrounding terrain towards the west in Mexico consists of steep hills. Many of the hills located closest to the Main Plaza are topped by multi-doored temples, including those of the Small

Acropolis and Temple 33. Contrasting with the monumental core of Yaxchilan in Mexico, on the Guatemala side of the river the terrain is open and low-lying, giving way to small hills. Immediately across the river from the epicenter of Yaxchilan, a long expanse of flat open terrain parallels the river bank, similar to the Main Plaza on the opposite shore. We did not identify any architectural features here, though a millennium of periodic overbanking of the Usumacinta River may have buried small structures and other anthropogenic features under meters of fine sediment.

Looking more broadly at the area of Guatemala that surrounds the omega-shaped bend in the Usumacinta River, the terrain to the northwest of the bend is especially rugged and remains unexplored by our research team. The terrain to the southeast of the bend is also hilly and the areas closest to the river remain unsurveyed by our team. Further to the southeast, however, we have conducted reconnaissance, including at the Preclassic site of Zancudero and at Classic-period El Kinel (Golden and Scherer 2006; Houston, Escobedo, Golden et al. 2006). The latter is located in the agricultural fields of the modern community of La Técnica, which itself sits atop a Late Preclassic site of the same name. This region around Zancudero, El Kinel, and La Técnica is for the most part flat, and the land adjacent to the river consists of very deep fluvial sediments making this ideal agricultural land in the present as in the past.

A mix of flat expansive terrain and relatively modest hills is located directly across the river from the epicenter of Yaxchilan. A narrow valley between the hills heads north-northeast away from the river on the bank opposite the monumental core of Yaxchilan. It is within this valley that our team identified defensive features, as described in the following section of this paper. We did not identify any significant masonry structures on the valley floor; however, a number of the hilltops feature low structures. Moreover, at least one hillslope was heavily modified by the ancient Maya, perhaps with terraces for agriculture (YaxGuat.01). We also identified additional terracing to the northwest (YaxGuat.04). The placement of structures atop the hills immediately northeast of Yaxchilan contrasts with the location of settlement elsewhere in the zone near the epicenter, which is generally located atop hills but at low elevations, a matter we will return to in this paper's discussion section.



**Figure 3.** View north from YaxGuat.07 illustrating flat basin rimmed by low hills (under tree cover) and possible architectural platforms at the treeline (photo by Charles Golden).

Eventually the valley that leads north-northeast from the Yaxchilan epicenter opens into a broad, flat, expansive area where the site cluster of Ixim is located (described below). At approximately 1.5 km from the riverbank we located two mound structures. We have identified these buildings as part of Yaxchilan-Guatemala. They are notably isolated from other settlement clusters, though the settlement gap may simply be an artifact of our incomplete survey.

An expansive flat zone, at least three square kilometers in area, is located east of the Yaxchilan monumental core on the Guatemala side of the river (Figure 3). This area remains incompletely surveyed, and periodic overbanking of the river has likely buried some structures under fluvial sediment. Nevertheless, we identified at least one large and formal architectural group (YaxGuat.07) consisting of at least three structures. This group is located 1.2 km east of the epicenter of Yaxchilan. The largest building in the architectural complex consists

of a single large mound (approximately 3 meters high) that may be the remains of a collapsed vaulted structure. A causeway (YaxGuat.06) leads west-northwest (278 degrees E of N) away from the architectural group in the direction of the monumental core of Yaxchilan. Although the full extent of the causeway is unknown, at least 200 meters of this feature is visible in Google Earth satellite imagery.

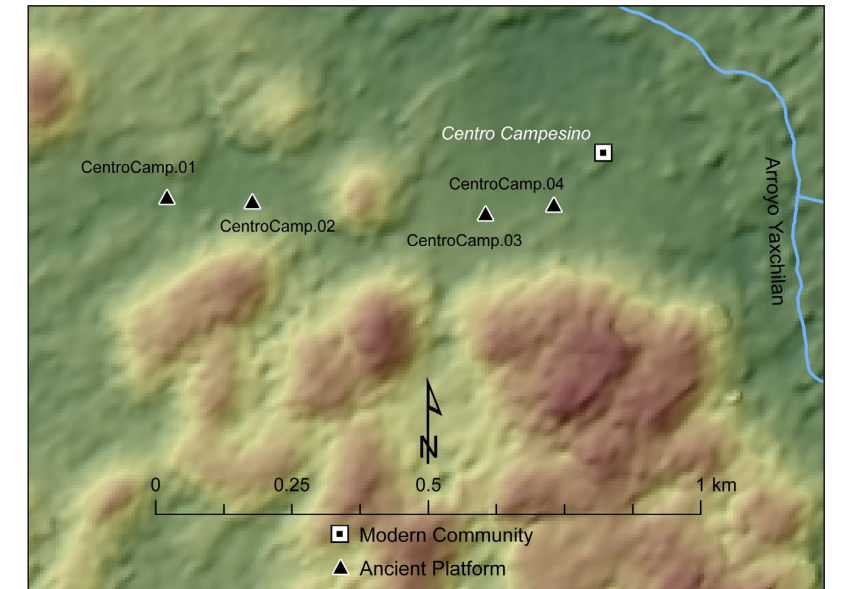
Notably, no such causeways are known for the epicenter of Yaxchilan. Rather, it may be that a series of such roadways connected important outlying groups to the monumental core. If so, full documentation of the feature may help reveal locations along the Usumacinta River from which canoes embarked for the monumental core on the Mexican side of the river. Complete clearing of the vegetation if not excavation will be required to fully define this architectural feature. At least two other low platforms were identified 230 and 300 meters north of this architectural complex.

### Centro Campesino

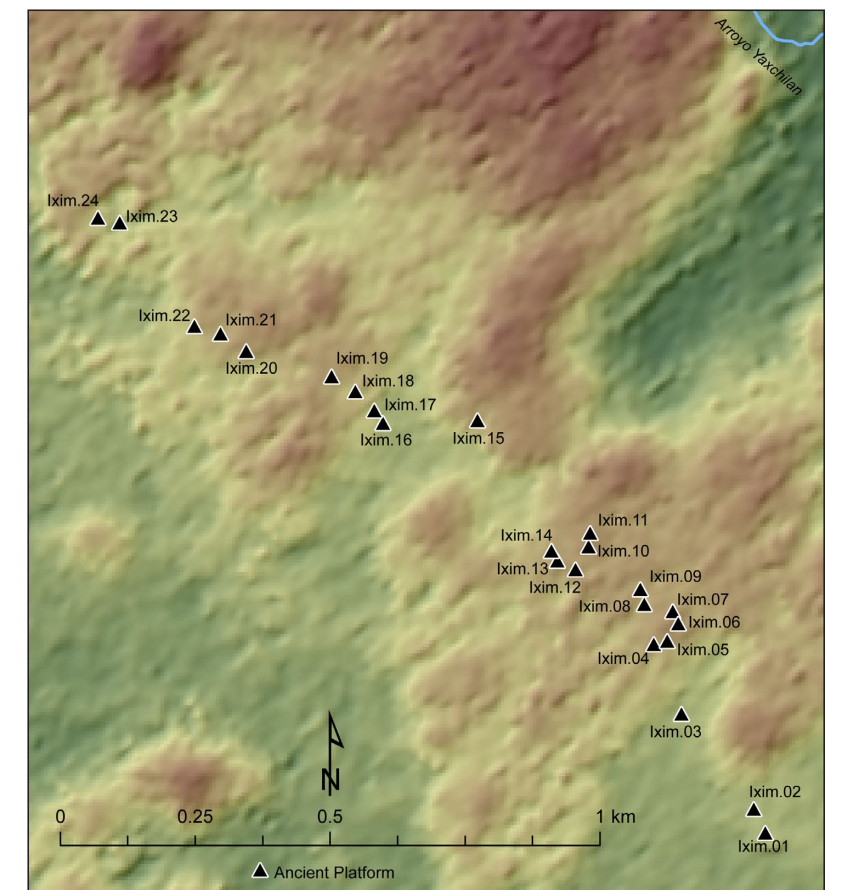
For much of the first decade of the twenty-first century, until internal conflicts led to the voluntary removal of the community, a large illegal settlement known as Centro Campesino was located 3.3 km northeast of Yaxchilan in a patch of flat, fertile terrain on the west bank of the Arroyo Yaxchilan. A park ranger station now occupies the former hamlet (Figure 4). At least three low mounds were noted on the road leading into the Centro Campesino camp and it is likely that additional structures are located in the vicinity, although some structures were possibly destroyed during the construction of the illegal settlement. A portion of the modern dirt road through the middle of Centro Campesino seems to overlay a long, low, ancient structure as evidenced by a large quantity of exposed cut limestone blocks visible in the path. Considering the form of this anthropogenic feature, it may be a causeway that either connected the center of the ancient community to the Arroyo Yaxchilan or perhaps was part of a longer *sacbe* that ran from Centro Campesino to other nearby ancient communities such as Ixim or Unión Maya Itza. Indeed, a contemporary road currently runs between Centro Campesino and the modern community of Unión Maya Itza. Two other ancient structures were located along this road.

### Ixim

Centro Campesino is situated on the southern edge of a large valley that runs parallel to the Usumacinta River and connects the center of the kingdom of Yaxchilan to the northern border sites, including La Pasadita and Tecolote. Walking northwest along this valley we encountered a dense concentration of settlement about 2 km to the west-northwest from the middle of Centro Campesino, identified here as Ixim (Figure 5). The settlement consists of a string of least 24 mound groups spread along a line of about 1.4 km. Most of the mound groups are located on slightly elevated areas and the general impression is that this may be an ancient agricultural community, with houses located on the low rises above the fields. Terracing was noted on at least one of the modest hills within Ixim. All the structures are relatively small and there is no apparent site center, although further survey is needed to confirm the absence of a civic ceremonial core.



**Figure 4.** The location of settlement at Centro Campesino, Peten, Guatemala (map by Charles Golden).

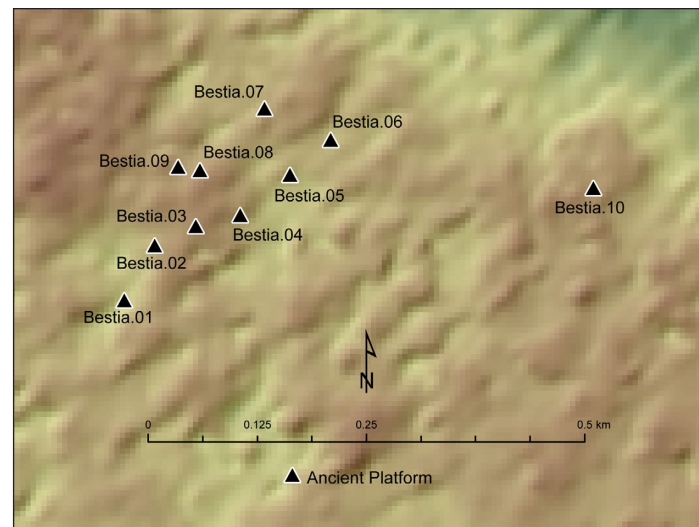


**Figure 5.** The location of settlement at Ixim, Peten, Guatemala (map by Charles Golden).

### La Bestia

About 750 m north of Ixim is the site core of La Bestia, so named because of the challenges of pedestrian survey through abandoned agricultural field where the recent regrowth of vegetation included vines running along the ground that seemed to grab at one's feet and made walking under the hot sun yet more difficult (Figure 6). In contrast to Ixim, La Bestia has both monumental architecture and a clear civic-ceremonial center. The site is located on a natural rise in the middle of the expansive valley that connects Yaxchilan to its northern border sites. The main plaza consists of at least five structures and covers an area of approximately 400 square meters.

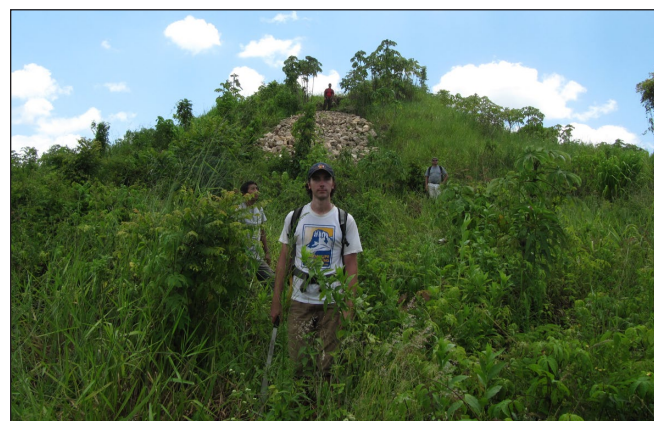
The largest of La Bestia's buildings (Bestia.04) is on the southern edge of the plaza and is at least five meters tall. In recent decades the structure was bisected by looters who left a gaping trench in the facade (Figure 7). The thick vegetation made it impossible to



**Figure 6.** The location of architecture at La Bestia, Peten, Guatemala (map by Charles Golden).



a



b



c

**Figure 7.** Principal structure at La Bestia (Bestia.04) illustrating: (a) the overall size of the structure; (b) the location of the looters' cut (the individual in the foreground is standing at the base of the platform, the highest individual is at the start of the cut); (c) details of the looters' cut (photos by Andrew Scherer and Charles Golden)

determine the precise form of the structure. However, extrapolating from general architectural patterns in the kingdom of Yaxchilan, the building is likely a large pyramidal platform that was once topped by a long multi-doored temple structure. However, project members saw no obvious vaulting stones or intact room spaces in the remains of the superstructure. At least two phases of construction of the basal platform were evident in the looters' cut. Collapsed rubble in the looters' trench makes details difficult to discern; however, the vague outline of what appears to be grave architecture suggests that the looters may have encountered a burial chamber. Ceramics found in the cut suggest a construction date no earlier than about AD 700. A small column altar found on the backside of the building appears to have been moved in recent years, hauled from elsewhere in the site to its present location near a collapsed modern shack.

A second large structure (Bestia.06) is perhaps 3–4 m tall and is located 270 m to the northeast of Bestia.04. There is also a low mound (Bestia.05) between these structures in what might be the center of the plaza. A third large structure (Bestia.07), about 2–3 m tall, is situated 245 m north-northeast of Bestia.04. There is a possible raised causeway running between the two buildings. An additional pair of structures (Bestia.08 and Bestia.09) is located 140 m to northeast of Bestia.04. At least one of these structures may have had a stone roof judging by the presence of vaulting stones. The remaining structures identified at the site include a single low mound (Bestia.01) and two modified hilltops (Bestia.02 and Bestia.10).

### La Pasadita

Scherer and Alcover completed a brief trip to La Pasadita to assess the status of the site and locate settlement and other anthropogenic features along the way. On the positive side we did not identify any new looting at the site. The principal structure, the source of its looted monuments and the murals, had collapsed sometime between Graham's initial visits to La Pasadita and those of Golden and colleagues (1999). By the time of this most recent visit, further deterioration was evident due to the environmental conditions and lack of interventions (Figure 8). It is our goal to return to La Pasadita in the future to both protect and preserve what remains of this structure and conduct formal research at the site.



a



b

**Figure 8.** Principal structure at La Pasadita: (a) in 1998 (photo by Charles Golden); (b) in 2016 (photo by Omar Alcover).

### El Crucero

While travelling to La Pasadita from Centro Campesino we encountered a single mound. This structure had been partially destroyed a few years prior to our arrival when a small house was built on the site. We called the location El Crucero due to its proximity to a point where the trail crosses an arroyo (Figure 1). The presence of artificial stone at the crossing suggests it was modified in antiquity either to facilitate crossing of the arroyo or to dam the waterway.

### Petem

Returning to Centro Campesino from La Pasadita we took an alternate route along an old logging road. This flat and easily traveled modern path almost certainly follows the ancient route between Yaxchilan and some of the northern border centers,

including La Pasadita and Tecolote. Although we were moving quickly in order to arrive back at Centro Campesino by nightfall, we managed to identify two large, elaborate patio groups. Each group consisted of a large platform, about 2–3 m high, capped by a series of large superstructures, each again about 2–3 m tall. Some of the superstructures may be the remains of collapsed vaulted structures. The architectural groups are located to the southwest of two large *aguadas*, one 1.5 km to the northwest and another 3 km to the northwest. Due to the proximity to these two water sources the site is identified here as Petem. Unfortunately, there was insufficient time for us to explore the site further, although the impression is that with so many large structures there must be a formal civic-ceremonial core nearby, perhaps comparable in size and scale to La Bestia.

### Defenses

The documentation of defensive features has been a central element in our regional research in the kingdom of Yaxchilan (Golden and Scherer 2006; Scherer and Golden 2009, 2014a). Our prior work focused on the secondary centers at the limits of the polity where all the known defensive systems have been reported to date. Our reconnaissance in 2016 and 2017 identified walls in other parts of the kingdom, including near the civic ceremonial core on the Guatemalan side of the river (Figures 2 and 9).

The general form of all fortifications, including those identified in 2016 and 2017, is the same: low walls that are most often located at a low point between two hills, running from one toe-slope to the other and generally situated perpendicular to the easiest route of travel (Scherer and Golden 2009). Some of these features bisect paths that are used today. They are uniformly built of loose dry-fill rubble, which could be interpreted as evidence for hasty construction but more likely simply reflects the expediency (not rapidity) of their construction. The walls themselves are too low to have served as effective barriers but are instead interpreted as the stone foundations of wooden palisades or barricades, the stone being necessary to reinforce wooden constructions sunk into the shallow soils of the region. For the kingdom of Yaxchilan, only the walls located near Tecolote have been excavated and none produced ceramic material or post-molds. However, similar features at La Mar, a Piedras Negras secondary center, have produced both, with the ceramics



Figure 9. All the known defensive walls in the Guatemalan portion of the kingdom of Yaxchilan (map by Charles Golden).

dating to the Late Classic period (Scherer et al. 2013).

Thus, what we have referred to as “walls” here and in other publications are probably best understood as the foundations of barricades, obstacles put in place either temporarily or permanently to hinder the mobility of invaders and create choke points from which defending warriors could stage counterattacks. Spanish accounts of Maya fortifications used during the conquest help clarify the form and function of such defensive features. In describing the siege of Chamula, a Tzotzil settlement 160 km to the west of Yaxchilan, Bernal Díaz writes:

Then we began to shoot many arrows and fire muskets at the people in the fort, but we could do them no harm whatever on account of the great *barricades* they had [erected] but on the contrary they constantly wounded many of our men. We stood fighting in this way all that day and they did not give way at all to us, and if we attempted to get through them to where they had constructed their *barricades and battlements*, there were over a thousand lancers at their posts for the defence of those whom we were endeavouring to get through. (Díaz del Castillo [1632]1912:4:306, emphasis added)

Díaz describes Chamula as a “fortress.” Although the modern town of San Juan Chamula has since moved to a lower elevation, its Late Postclassic predecessor was situated atop a hill, surrounded by steep descents, some of which are described “like going into the bottomless pit” (Díaz del Castillo [1632]1912:4:307). At no point, however, does Díaz describe

Chamula as circumscribed by a wall. Instead, the barricades seem to have been strategically positioned to block entrances into the town, and these were reinforced by warriors as noted in the passage above. So effective was this defensive system that the Spaniards needed to construct a small siege engine with a wooden covering in order to protect twenty men from the onslaught of projectiles hurled at them by the Chamulans from their walls (Díaz del Castillo [1632]1912:4:306-307).

The Lienzo de Quauhquechollan, a pictorial account of the Conquest produced by a Nahua community that assisted the Spaniards in their invasion of Guatemala, provides numerous illustrations of barricades employed defensively by the Kaqchikel. The barricades are shown as a cross-hatched structure embedded into a foundation, shown as grey-brown or light cream-brown linear ovals. The cross-hatched features seem to be unambiguously wooden poles, the size, shape, and color all consistent with other objects (spear shafts, tree trunks) comprised of wood illustrated on the lienzo. The foundational features are more ambiguous. The color is the same as that used to illustrate the pit portion of the spear-pit traps and also to depict the borders of roads, the edges of rivers, the ground surfaces from which trees spring, and in one instance the foliage of trees. It may very well be that most of the barricade foundations in the highlands were built from earth in contrast to the stone used in lowland barricade construction described here. Alternatively, it may be that the stone foundations were covered in dirt, in both the highlands and perhaps also in the lowlands.

Curiously, one of the barricades shown on the lienzo is light cream-brown in color, the same as that depicted for a pyramid, ballcourt, and other masonry constructions. Although this may be artistic variation, it could also signify the artists’ memory of at least one stone foundation for a barricade encountered during the conquest of Guatemala. Otherwise, the barricades on the lienzo are depicted as distinct from the masonry stone walls that are shown surrounding the communities of Quauhquechollan and Cuchumatanes. In both instances the stone walls are depicted as linear arrangements of stone blocks topped by a stepped motif.

Florine Hasselbergs (2008:132) suggests the barricades on the lienzo operated as “fortification glyphs.” Following Ross Hassig’s (1988:8) interpretation of the use of barricades by Aztec tributaries, Hasselbergs (2008:132) further suggests that the barricades served as statements of resistance and rebellion, suggesting that “since most movement was based on foot travel, blocking a road was obviously not very effective for barring traffic or stopping armies.” We suspect that this interpretation is overlooking the potential value of these features, which could have been expediently raised or dismantled as needed. Although such barricades would not have been able to impede travel entirely, they would

have slowed travel and re-routed attackers onto more treacherous, irregular terrain where they would be easier to ambush by defenders. Moreover, such delays would have afforded defenders valuable time to either prepare themselves for a counterattack or to retreat. Finally, they would have slowed the attackers if retreat proved necessary.

Five walls (i.e., barricade foundations) were identified at Yaxchilan-Guatemala in 2016 and 2017, providing the first evidence that the polity capital was fortified. The location of these features is surprising considering that they are located in the heartland of the kingdom, in an area that by all material evidence was closely tied into the exchange of goods and common social practice with the polity capital itself (Golden and Scherer 2013; Golden, Scherer, Muñoz, and Vásquez 2008). Moreover, these barricades were located near the river, which would have served as Yaxchilan’s most important line of defense. It may be that Yaxchilan wanted to be prepared for an attack that breached the outer line of defenses maintained by its border lords along the northern limit of the kingdom (at Tecolote, La Pasadita, etc.). Alternatively, it may be that the defenses functioned to slow attacking warriors who arrived by canoe on the Usumacinta River but were directing their attack against the settlement on the Guatemalan side of the river. Additional walls have been reported on the Mexican side near the epicenter of Yaxchilan, including a large feature that closes off the chokepoint at the omega-bend in the river (Echauri Pérez and Tejeda Monroy 2019). Excavation is needed within these features to determine if they were built close to the time of Yaxchilan’s collapse (suggesting an escalation in war events) or were constructed much earlier in the Classic period, reflecting a landscape of endemic warfare.

Two other walls were found during the 2016 and 2017 survey. The first was located 2.2 km to the west-northwest of La Bestia. This is the first wall to be found midway between the polity capital and the kingdom’s border. It may be that it was built to slow attackers who had penetrated the heartland of the kingdom, or it may simply signify that some sites within the kingdom possessed their own defenses. The second wall was located 700 meters to the north of the site of El Tunel, first identified in 2004. El Tunel remains poorly understood and its epicenter has not yet been securely located. El Tunel is located 2.4 km to the east-northeast of La Pasadita and was, as best as we understand, another site located along Yaxchilan’s northern border. In that context, the new wall at El Tunel brings the total of walls at the northern limits of the kingdom to nineteen. When combined with the other walls noted above, ranging from the relatively small palisade bases to the massive stonework of Zancudero, the total number of walls known for the Guatemalan side of the Yaxchilan kingdom is 26.

Coupling the archaeological evidence for

Classic-period barricades with evidence from Conquest-era documents allows us to summarize a few key observations regarding Maya defensive systems. Barricades are a particular type of defensive feature (distinct from stone walls) that were placed along routes of travel, were constructed from lashed wooden beams, had a foundation of either earth or stone, could be either raised in defense or were permanently placed, and were highly effective even against Spaniards equipped with steel blades, firearms, and horses. Their ubiquity in the kingdom of Yaxchilan (and throughout the Usumacinta River region) during the Classic period and their continued use during the Postclassic period suggests the efficacy of barricades as a form of military defense.

### Monuments

The discovery of carved hieroglyphic monuments bearing not only the emblem glyph but also the very images of the lords of Yaxchilan has been critical for mapping the greater kingdom of Yaxchilan to its secondary subordinate sites located within Guatemala. The general formula of these secondary site monuments is that they bear the image of the king of Yaxchilan in the company of one of his vassals, either dancing, dressed as warriors (and usually parading over captives), or with the king shown seated on a throne receiving tribute from his subordinates. Although not recognized for what they were at the time, the first reported monuments in Guatemala created by sculptors associated with Yaxchilan appeared in Dana and Ginger Lamb's ([1951]1984) account of their purported journey to the "lost site" of Laxtunich.

Two decades after the Lambs' journey, Ian Graham (1972, 2010) made the first of several visits to La Pasadita where he was able to match the measurements of sawn monument remains with the carved faces of lintels housed in Berlin, Germany, and Leiden, Netherlands. In removing these sculptures using hand- and chain-saws, looters cut the monuments' central image from the larger bulk of the sculpture making them easier to transport. As a result, it is possible to tie a looted monument to its source site by linking a monument to the remaining "carcass" left behind. A lintel fragment in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is likely also from La Pasadita as it features Tiloom, a local noble bearing the title of *sajal* who also appears on the other two La Pasadita monuments. Other Yaxchilan secondary site monuments have surfaced in private collections and may either be from sites in Guatemala or Mexico (Mayer 1995:74-79). Despite our best efforts, we have yet to locate any of the unprovenanced monuments' carcasses.

In the late 1990s, residents of the modern community of La Técnica found a small monument, likely



**Figure 10.** El Kinel Monument 1 (photo by Charles Golden). Now housed in the Community Museum and Tourist Information Office at La Técnica Agropecuaria.

a stela, at the site of El Kinel, which is located just west of the town (Figure 10; Houston, Escobedo, Golden et al. 2006; Morales 2001; Morales and Ramos 2002). This monument is unique among the known Yaxchilan monuments in Guatemala in that it bears only the image of the king (Shield Jaguar IV), without any subordinate lords. The residents of La Técnica found the sculpture while building a road through the community, near a small mound in an unimposing architectural group. In light of El Kinel's proximity to Yaxchilan it is plausible that the monument was moved to El Kinel following the collapse of the royal dynasty at Yaxchilan. Certainly the sculpture's small size (110 cm long, 56 cm wide, 20 cm thick) would have made transport feasible. It is further possible that it was originally placed in the area we are describing here as Yaxchilan-Guatemala and was later moved to El Kinel.

In the early 2000s, the illegal occupation at Centro Campesino greatly exacerbated looting and other illicit activities in the southern reaches of the Sierra del Lacandon. Much of the area immediately across the river from Yaxchilan was clear-cut and roads were opened into the forest to the north. During this time at least three monuments were removed from the park. Two of these were intercepted together in the modern community of Retalteco, located 15 km to the east of Centro Campesino and along the road that was used to reach the illegal occupation (Houston, Golden, Muñoz, and Scherer 2006). The first of these sculptures is a circular stone with a crude incised human face (Figure 11). We have previously hypothesized that this stone was the cover for a cistern or *chultun* (subterranean storage chamber). The former seems most likely given the numerous cisterns documented in the region, particularly at Tecolote, some of which were associated with otherwise uncarved circular stone covers (Scherer and Golden 2014b:Fig. 10.4). The second of the monuments is a lintel fragment from the lower portion of a scene which includes the feet of Bird Jaguar IV, two of his wives, and his *baah sajal* (head lord) K'an Tok Wayib (Figure 12).



**Figure 11.** Incised face on possible cistern lid (photo by Charles Golden). Photographed in the former office of the Instituto de Antropología e Historia, Flores, Peten. Present location unknown to the authors.



**Figure 12.** Lintel fragment reported to be from Tecolote (photo by Charles Golden). Photographed in the former office of the Instituto de Antropología e Historia, Flores, Peten.

At the time of their interception, the authorities received no information regarding the possible source of either monuments beyond the general area of the PNSL. The article we initially published detailing these sculptures describes them as “possibly from the area of Retalteco.” During our 2016 and 2017 field seasons, a local area resident reported to us that he was told by people with first-hand knowledge that the lintel fragment was in fact pulled from a building at Tecolote. To date no other sculptures have been found at Tecolote, and the preservation of its principal structure is owing to the fact that its lintels are uncarved and so have not tempted looters who will otherwise rip lintels from their place, destroying the integrity of the buildings, as was the case at La Pasadita. At Tecolote, however, there are other collapsed vaulted buildings at the site that we have not fully investigated, and one of those is likely the source of this monument fragment. Moreover, it is highly probable that the rest of this fine monument is still at the site. Epigraphically and contextually, Tecolote makes for a logical source for the monument. Thus far, Tecolote is the largest of Yaxchilan’s known secondary centers in Guatemala, and so it would be logical that it was the seat of power for one of Bird Jaguar’s most prominent subordinates.

The third Yaxchilan monument to surface in Guatemala in recent years is a drum altar currently in the possession of the Fundación La Ruta Maya in Guatemala City and recently described by Nikolai Grube and Camilo Alejandro Luín (2014; see also Zender et al. 2016:45-46). Compositionally the sculpture resembles a codex-style vase in that it depicts a courtly scene wrapped around the circumference of the object. The sculpture depicts Shield Jaguar III receiving captives from two subordinate lords as a third courtier looks on. The altar appears to have been carved in memory of a brother of Shield Jaguar and was associated with his tomb. This would suggest that this kingly relative is interred somewhere in Guatemala where he likely served as a local governor in life. The monument’s dedication date is likely June 14, AD 764, making it the earliest known Yaxchilan-style monument found in Guatemala. Indeed, it is also the only known monument depicting Shield Jaguar III recovered in Guatemala; all other Yaxchilan-style monuments provenanced to Guatemala feature either his son, Bird Jaguar IV, or his grandson, Shield Jaguar IV. Considering the timing of this monument’s appearance in a private collection, we suspect that, like the monuments intercepted at Retalteco, it was extracted during the illegal occupation at Centro Campesino. Moreover, considering the relatively early date of the monument, it may have originally come from closer to Yaxchilan, before the northern border sites were formally established, perhaps even in the area we are calling here Yaxchilan-Guatemala.

## Conclusions

Despite the limited scope of our recent research in the Guatemalan portion of the kingdom of Yaxchilan, we have gained new insight into the southern reaches of the polity. Overall, settlement is dense in this region and it is likely that a significant portion of the polity’s populace dwelled here by the eighth century, attracted to the relatively forgiving terrain and the deep, rich fluvial sediments along the Usumacinta River. Although much of this settlement is modest, the identification of La Bestia and Petem with their more substantial architectural presence suggests that some minor nobility were scattered throughout the landscape. Nevertheless, the Yaxchilan kings’ most important vassals were housed at the border sites as evidenced, for example, by the identification of Tecolote as the source of what has come to be erroneously known as the Retalteco monument. Indeed, it is also the border sites that possess the greatest concentration of defensive works, which are probably best referred to as barricades. Nevertheless, our recent work demonstrates that even the polity capital had its defenses.

The border lords were undoubtedly tasked with the defense of the kingdom, and judging by Late Classic settlement patterns they were largely successful, at least through much of the Classic period. Settlement at border sites like Tecolote and La Pasadita are notable for being largely situated atop hills and generally away from natural bodies of water, instead relying on artificially constructed cisterns to collect and maintain water. Defense was clearly a concern. In contrast, settlement near the polity capital is located in flat, lowland areas and positioned to take advantage of abundant natural sources of water, including the Arroyo Yaxchilan and the Usumacinta River. Future research, especially lidar survey which is planned for the near future, will refine our understanding of settlement in the Guatemalan portion of the kingdom of Yaxchilan.

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