

Architecture, Vision, and Ritual: Seeing Maya Lintels at Yaxchilan Structure 23

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On the rear wall of the Mexican galleries at the British Museum, London, Yaxchilan Lintels 24 and 25 occupy pride of place (Fig. 1). Inset into the red wall and displayed vertically, each lintel is carefully lit to bring out every nuance of its sculptural detail, from the different levels of relief to the traces of remaining color. This form of display feels so congenial that it is easy to forget that it is not how the lintels were made to be seen. In their original architectural context, they spanned the doorways of Structure 23, a small palace in the Maya city of Yaxchilan, in modern-day Chiapas, Mexico (Fig. 2). Structure 23 was dedicated in 726 CE by Ix K'abal Xook (hereafter Lady Xook), a principal wife of one of Yaxchilan's most powerful kings, Itzamnaaj Bahlam or Shield Jaguar III (hereafter Shield Jaguar), who ruled the city from 681 to 742. It is notable as one of the few examples of female patronage surviving from ancient Mesoamerica. Each lintel was a three-dimensional object, carved on both its underside and outer edge, with large flanges projecting beyond the carved areas to anchor the lintel in the surrounding walls (Fig. 2). The elegant figures would have been

1 Lintel 24, Structure 23, Yaxchilan, 723–26, on display in the British Museum, London (artwork in the public domain; photograph by the author)

2 Lintel 23, Structure 23, Yaxchilan, 723–26, spanning the reconstructed northwestern doorway (artwork in the public domain; photograph by the author)





3 Site map of Yaxchilan (drawing by Ian Graham, © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, PM 2004.15.7.1). An arrow indicates the location of Structure 23.

positioned horizontally, not vertically, perpendicular to the viewer who would pass underneath the carving when entering the building. The lintels were an integral part of an architectural experience.¹

Reconstructing the experience of Structure 23 is now difficult. The building has largely collapsed, and the lintels are dispersed between London, Mexico City, and the archaeological site of Yaxchilan (Fig. 3).² How we see Structure 23 now is fragmented by the history of collecting and modern priorities, as well as the inescapable history of power imbalances between Europe and Latin America. Historically, analysis has privileged the figural decorations over the textual ones and the objects more accessible in metropolitan museums over those in museum storage or at the remote archaeological site.

In their original architectural context, Maya lintels did not permit the kind of sustained, careful, and iconographically focused viewing that they have so often received in modern times.³ For this reason, they pose an important challenge for art history. Most of

the tools of the discipline are predicated on a kind of disembodied close looking, a silent and individual scopical encounter with the work of art in a museum, on the page of a book, or on a screen. While close looking might have been possible in the workshop while the lintels were coming into being, once they were in place, they could never have been seen so closely again, and their imperfect visibility played into Mesoamerican theories of vision as an elite power. In place, the lintels were the recipients of a kind of *embodied* looking, looking that was awkward, inconvenient, incomplete, and distracted, accompanied by movement, music, prayers, recitations, incense, sweat, and feasting. As part of a unified architectural program, the lintels guided and structured engagements with the building they adorned, an example of what Wei-Cheng Lin has termed “performative architecture.”⁴ Yet the frequency of dedication statements on lintels may also suggest that looking was not the point at all: that making and dedicating the carving mattered far more than any subsequent act of viewing.

LOOKING UP, LOOKING DOWN

The Classic Mayan term for a lintel, *pakab tuunil* or *pakbu tuun*, literally signifies “face-down stone,” an unmistakable reference to the traditional but confounding placement of carving on the underside of the lintel.⁵ Just over 150 carved lintels survive today, dating from the fifth to the ninth century CE; far more remaining lintels show no signs of decoration. It is hard to know how widespread the practice of decorating lintels was, since wood, surely the most common material for this architectural support, is so vulnerable to decay, and even now-blank stones might once have been painted. The predominant trend is for carving on the underside of lintels, occasionally supplemented by carving on the outer edge as well.⁶

Lintels slow passage through the liminal space of the Maya doorway, which is unusually deep because of the need for thick walls to support the heavy vaulted roof and roof comb. Whether decorated with text, image, or a combination of both, a lintel forces the viewer to pause and look up to take notice of its carvings. In Maya pictorial convention, the highest-status figure is typically positioned at the highest point in the composition, such that all other figures must gaze up at him (that highest-status figure is almost always male).⁷ Looking up at the lintel might thus be construed as an acknowledgment of lower status, putting the viewer in his or her place before even entering the structure.

What is even more powerful is the reciprocal gaze of the figures pictured on the lintel. The composition of two confronted figures, so common on lintels in the Yaxchilan region, means that a participant meets the gaze of one of the carved figures when entering and another while exiting. Recalling that the Maya often conceived of images as vital and active beings, it is likely that power could also be attributed to carved eyes.⁸ When you see the lintel, the lintel also sees you. The figures on the lintels, in addition to occupying the privileged position in a hierarchical relationship, might also be understood as actively engaging with the things that fall into their field of vision.⁹ The power of this visual field is exemplified by the Classic Mayan term *ichmal*. Always possessed (the form is *yichmal*, or “his visual field”), the term refers to events that happened not only within the sight of the highest-status person mentioned in the text but also within that person’s political and social control.¹⁰ When a ritual happens in the *ichmal* of another king, for example, we know that the ruler doing the viewing is the overlord of the celebrant. Gods and ancestors, too, are recorded as surveying the events within their *ichmal* on Maya stelae.¹¹

We can see these dynamics in play on Stela 11 from Yaxchilan, where the ruler Bird Jaguar IV (r. 752–68) towers above three bound captives (Fig. 4). As he glances down at them, they fall into his *ichmal*, or field of vision, which is rendered even more extraordinary by the

deity mask shown in cutaway fashion in front of his face.¹² The captives' act of looking up cements their submission. The entire scene is surveyed from above by Bird Jaguar's deceased parents: King Shield Jaguar III (under whose auspices Structure 23 was dedicated) and another of his royal wives, Lady Ik' Skull. Cast in the role of honored and deified ancestors, on other stelae, such overlooking figures are sometimes placed within rounded cartouches: the king's father in a sun cartouche as a divinized solar being and the king's mother in a moon cartouche as if she were an aspect of the moon goddess.¹³ As these deified figures look down on the proceedings, they assert the transcendent power of a royal *ichnal*, which surpasses even death.

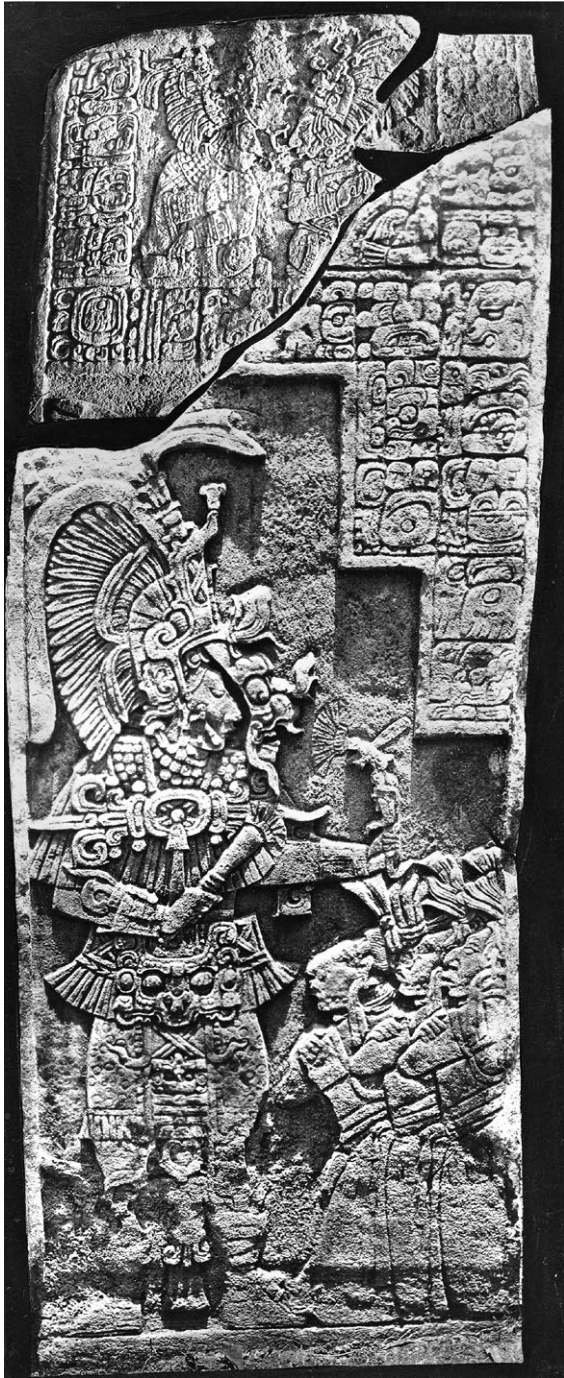
Elite sight was understood as exceptionally powerful, agentive, and perceptive.¹⁴ Mesoamerican theories of extramissive vision implied a profoundly undemocratic understanding of the powers of sight.¹⁵ Unlike modern Enlightenment theories of vision, where perception is constant and universal (every retina receives the same stimulus of light, unless deficient in a way that requires corrective lenses or surgery),¹⁶ Mesoamerican seeing might be vastly *unequal*, dependent on the power of the rays one could project out from one's eyes to discover the world. A king or a shaman, for example, might have powers of sight unlike those of ordinary people and more like the powers of supernatural or divine beings, who were also endowed with superior vision in Mesoamerican cosmologies. As Stephen Houston and Karl Taube observe, many Maya deities have square or spiral-shaped eyes, intimating unusual capacities for vision and understanding.¹⁷

The gulf between human and divine sight is made clearest in a seventeenth-century Quiché Mayan text called the *Popol Vuh*. When humans were first created, their sight was like that of the gods:

Perfect was their sight, and perfect was their knowledge of everything beneath the sky. If they gazed about them, looking intently, they beheld that which was in the sky and that which was upon the earth. Instantly, they were able to behold everything. They did not have to walk to see all that existed beneath the sky. They merely saw it from wherever they were. Thus their knowledge became full. Their vision passed beyond the trees and the rocks, beyond the lakes and the seas, beyond the mountains and the valleys.¹⁸

This potent vision, and the knowledge that came along with it, threatened the gods who had created humanity; because of their powerful sight, the first humans were too godlike. So the gods blurred their sight, "like breath upon the face of a mirror. . . . They could only see nearby; things were clear to them only where they were. Thus their knowledge was lost."¹⁹ In addition to demonstrating the superior capacities of divine sight, this passage highlights the tight link between seeing and knowing in Maya thought; as Evon Vogt notes in an ethnography of the modern Maya community of Zinacantan, "Seeing is more than a metaphor for vision; it *is* knowing, insight in general."²⁰

Thus, in materializing the challenges of vision, the Maya lintel instantiates claims about power. Poised at the edge of a darkened interior to which the eyes must adjust, the lintel reasserts hierarchies of sight and knowledge just at a moment when the participant is experiencing the limitations of human sight.²¹ The viewer, positioned as a supplicant relative to the carving above, never achieves a perfect look at a lintel in situ. But if imperfect seeing is equated with imperfect knowing, then perfect knowledge might imply a kind of powerful, godlike sight. Here we can imagine the social advantages of a patron or artist who had full access to the lintel in the workshop before it was installed in its oblique and poorly



4 Stela 11, Yaxchilan, temple side, 752 (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, PM 2004.1.405.46)

lit architectural setting.²² Laying claim to such privileged knowledge, being able to decipher a particularly obscure image or lintel text, would allow a select few to demonstrate their superior capacities for perception. With their unusually self-reflexive program, the lintels of Structure 23 offer an unparalleled opportunity to consider the nature and temporalities of Maya vision.

THE LINTEL UNDERSIDES

We are used to seeing the figural undersides of Lintels 24, 25, and 26 displayed vertically and in isolation from the rest of the architectural program, as if they were paintings—and, indeed,

one striking accomplishment of the Structure 23 program is the success of this independent and isolated view. Read from left to right (the normal order of Maya hieroglyphic texts) the figural scenes on the undersides of the Structure 23 lintels seem to depict three successive actions. On the leftmost lintel, Lintel 24, Shield Jaguar stands in profile, holding a flaming torch over the head of the kneeling Lady Xook, who pulls a thorn-studded rope through her tongue in a bloodletting rite (Fig. 5). On Lintel 25, which stood above the central doorway, Lady Xook again kneels in the lower right, her body even more compressed into the corner space as a bicephalic serpent rears above her, disgorging an armed warrior from its upper maw, while a skeletal deity emerges from the lower jaws (Fig. 6). Above the rightmost doorway, Lintel 26 shows Shield Jaguar dressed for battle in padded armor, holding out his hand toward Lady Xook, who offers his jaguar helmet and flexible shield (Fig. 7).

Seen next to one another, the undersides of the lintels begin to suggest a narrative of cause and effect, of sequential action: bloodletting leads to visions in preparation for battle. However, the narrative evoked by this visual sequence is belied by the chronology of the texts, which place the leftmost scene in 709, the central scene at the time of Shield Jaguar's accession in 681, and do not clearly specify the date of the rightmost panel.²³ Still, the appeal of this view raises the possibility that the lintels might have been displayed before being installed in the structure, much as the carvings of the Parthenon frieze were made available

for inspection before their final placement.²⁴ Furthermore, the plans for the lintels surely existed in preliminary drawings before being carved in stone; by comparing the undersides of the lintels in this way, we may share the vision of the artist and patrons who had access to these images.

Of course, this vertical and sequential view is not how the lintels were ultimately made to be experienced. Once in place, no two lintels could be seen at once: the viewer would have had to hold the other lintel images in memory as she proceeded from doorway to doorway,



5 Lintel 24, Structure 23, Yaxchilan, 723–26, limestone, 43 × 30¾ × 2½ in. (109 × 78 × 6 cm). British Museum, London, Am1923,Maud.4 (artwork in the public domain; photograph by Justin Kerr)

6 Lintel 25, Structure 23, Yaxchilan, 723–26, limestone, 48½ × 33¾ × 5¼ in. (121 × 85.5 × 13.5 cm). British Museum, London, Am1923,Maud.5 (artwork in the public domain; photograph by Justin Kerr)



while that spatial progression itself imparted a sense of the passage of time between one image and the next. These lintels were part of a much more complex and interactive plan in their original context, one that furthermore addressed the challenges of its own embodied viewing.

PROBLEMATIZING SIGHT

Tensions of viewing enliven the carved lintels of Yaxchilan Structure 23. Arguably the first sculptured lintel program undertaken after a long hiatus at Yaxchilan, it seems to represent a moment when Maya artists reflected on and experimented with the constraints of the genre.²⁵

While each bold composition could be taken in with a quick glance, grasping the full ambition of the program required a far more intensive engagement. The lintels address their own conditions of visibility in ways that earlier and later lintels at the site do not. Deep relief, curving surfaces, and use of color all facilitated seeing the lintels, while at the same time, the intimate scenes depicted on the lintel undersides address the limitations of sight. Specifically, they present seeing as an elite and gendered act, with important implications for hierarchy and power.

First, the concessions to visibility: the depth of relief of the Structure 23 carvings is unprecedented at Yaxchilan. The deepest relief on Lintels 24 and 26 approaches 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (4.5 centimeters), far greater than the average $\frac{3}{8}$ inch (1 cm) of relief depth across all Yaxchilan lintels.²⁶ Figures appear to hover above the background plane, casting dramatic shadows. Denying the customary flatness of architectural stone, the undersides of the lintels are gently bowed, curving outward toward the viewer, exposing the central part of the lintel, which might otherwise be occluded by the rest of the carving.²⁷ These convex surfaces are not perfectly symmetrical: the lintel undersides instead swell toward the left side, what would have been the shadowed inner edge when the lintel was in place (this is especially notable in Fig. 1). Similar accommodations were made on the outer edges of the lintels.²⁸ These slight, barely noticeable adjustments may have made the lintels easier to see in situ.

Color likewise aided overall perception, but it did not highlight every carved feature. While traces of color remain on the Structure 23 lintels,

we can achieve a better sense of the original color by examining a lintel from the Yaxchilan dependency of La Pasadita, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Fig. 8).²⁹ Here, color picks out bodies against the solid red ground, increasing overall legibility, but at the same time, it occludes many of the finer details of the carving. The glyphs, for example, are covered with thick red pigment, which may have obscured their reading; the finely described



7 Lintel 26, Structure 23, Yaxchilan, 723–26, limestone, 84 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 33 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (215 × 85 × 25 cm). Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City, 10-9790 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © Jorge Pérez de Lara)

textile patterns are similarly painted a uniform color. The same patterns can be observed on the Structure 23 lintels: solid background colors contrast with the colors of bodies, yet not all carved details received equal attention. For example, the laboriously carved pattern on Lady Xook's huipil was never highlighted in pigment: at the most, the trim was blue while the body of the garment was red or purple (Fig. 5).³⁰ Such boldly contrasting blocks of color made the principal features of the scene more visible but obscured many of the most elaborate elements of the carving, and may have compromised the readability of the texts.

In spite of these concessions to vision, other aspects of the program refer to its

absence. All three figural lintels depict intimate scenes involving royal protagonists, where the carving renders visible and permanent something that was originally private and ephemeral. Lintel 26 addresses the gendered aspects of vision and visibility (Fig. 7). This scene, in which Lady Xook presents shield and jaguar helmet to her husband, could be understood as a prelude to Shield Jaguar's public appearance, fully dressed in the same regalia. Two decades earlier, in 702, Shield Jaguar was pictured wearing a very similar jaguar helmet on Stela 20, displayed outside Structure 41; on this public stela, he towers above a captive, with no royal women in sight.³¹ Indeed, it may have been precisely because lintels were so hard to see that customarily secluded royal women could be so freely represented on them.

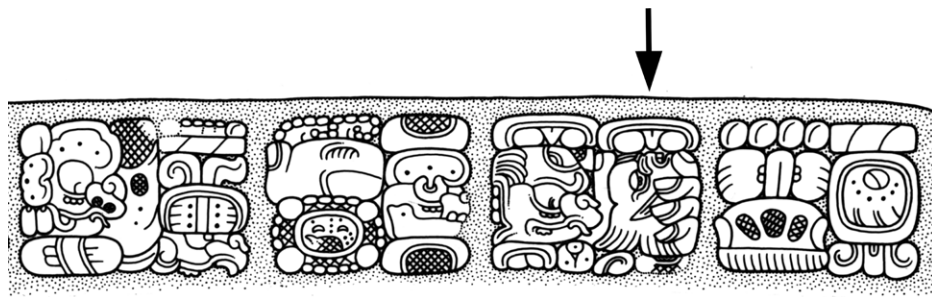
Lintel 24, by contrast, presents a nighttime ritual (Fig. 5). Shield Jaguar holds a torch by whose light Lady Xook draws blood.³² The background was originally painted a dark blue to evoke this nighttime setting: remains of blue paint, likely mixed with charcoal to darken it, surround the flames of the torch and survive behind Lady Xook's back, while curls of black



8 Lintel, probably from the site of La Pasadita, a Yaxchilan dependency, ca. 770, limestone with pigment, 35 × 34½ × 2¾ in. (88.9 × 87.6 × 7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979, 1979.206.1047 (artwork in the public domain)

smoke lie in medium relief behind the torch's flames. If this lintel was displayed with the right side facing outward, as seems likely from the cut marks on the edge, then Shield Jaguar's torch would have been in the outer left or western corner of the lintel, the most brightly lit corner of the doorway in the evenings, so that the natural light illuminating the scene would seem to have come from the carved and painted torch.³³ Both the scene and its deployment in architectural space address the challenges of seeing in the dark.

The scene of conjuring on the central Lintel 25 features yet another kind of contingent vision (Fig. 6). What is pictured here could be seen only by Lady Xook, in the altered state brought about by penance, bloodletting, and other ritual preparation. Her vision is complex, allusive, and full of doublings. Masked ancestral deities emerge from both mouths of a bicephalic serpent whose sinuous curves are shown from multiple viewpoints at once. As the serpent body twists and turns, dorsal patterned scales and ventral overlapping plates are alternately revealed.³⁴ Yet those overlapping ventral scales also look strikingly like the overlapping segments of the body of a centipede, while the two small hooks projecting off the body



9 Lintel 25, Structure 23, Yaxchilan, detail of main underside text (drawing by Ian Graham, © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, PM 2004.16.6.5.25). The glyph for **TZAK**, or “conjuring,” indicated in the passage above, shows a fish grasped in a left hand. It is the only glyph not reversed in the entire inscription.

suggest both centipede’s legs and the thorns on the thorn-studded rope that brought this vision into being.³⁵ The serpent’s body intertwines with another sinuous curve, crosshatched to show darkness, which reads as another body but may instead be a curl of smoke out of which the vision emerges, though no fire is shown.³⁶

The entire scene is a play on vision and revelation, entirely appropriate to the lintel’s theme of conjured visions: the Mayan glyph for conjuring, **TZAK**, shows a fish grasped in a left hand, an apt metaphor for the elusive nature of contact with the supernatural (Fig. 9). The inscriptions on the underside of this lintel are in mirror writing, underscoring the uncertain nature of vision and understanding. The text reads from right to left, instead of from left to right, as is typical of Maya inscriptions, and each individual glyph block is written in reverse, as if reflected across a vertical axis—with the exception of the glyph **TZAK**, which is left unreversed to highlight the participation of the left hand in this uncanny act of conjuring.³⁷ The text momentarily disorients the reader. The glyphs look familiar but are at first impenetrable. Only when the inversion is recognized can meaning fall into place. The choice of mirror writing may have pragmatic justifications (see below), but it is also entirely appropriate to the perilous world of supernatural visions conjured on this lintel.³⁸

Each figural scene thus illustrates a different obstacle to vision, a different kind of privileged sight. We see the private rituals of the women’s realm, the actions prior to the king’s public appearances, sacrifices conducted in torch-lit darkness, elusive conjured visions. Deep carving and bowed surfaces strive to make these difficulties of seeing visible to the observer. Yet even remarking on these dynamics of vision has required performing precisely the kind of close visual analysis that the lintels themselves would not permit in situ.

ARCHITECTURE, TEXT, IMAGE, AND PERFORMANCE

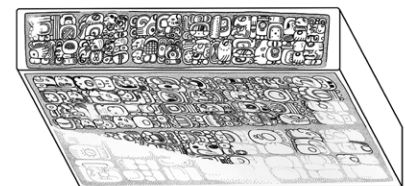
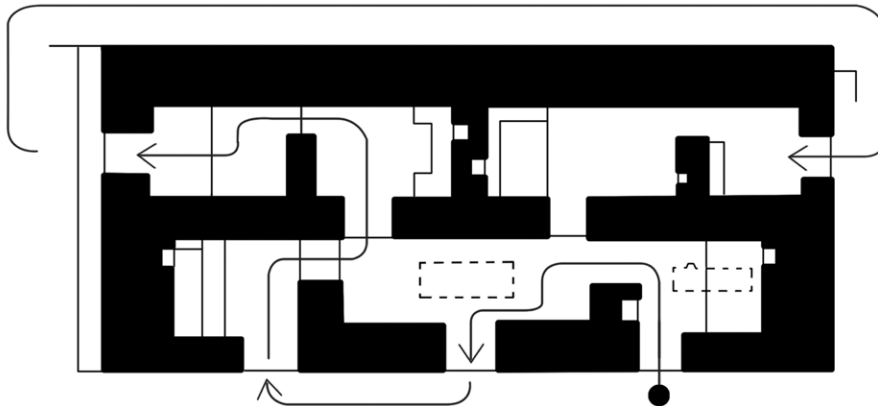
Located inside the doorways of a modest palace on a ridge above the main plaza of Yaxchilan, in an area dedicated to elite women, the lintels’ visibility was limited by social as well as physical constraints (Figs. 3, 10). Surely not everyone who had access to the plaza would have been able to climb the stair to access these palaces and temples. At the same time, from this ridge, royal women would have had a privileged view of public activities on the plaza below—all such actions would fall into their *ichmal*—while simultaneously being sheltered from prying eyes.³⁹

Like many other buildings at Yaxchilan, Structure 23 features three doorways on its front facade, crowded slightly toward the center, all leading into a single front room (Fig. 11). Thick internal buttresses that supported the heavy vault, now collapsed, subdivide the long and narrow space. Two doors in the rear wall of the front room offer access to paired rear chambers, each with an unobtrusive side doorway.

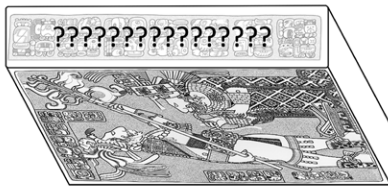
Structure 23’s four carved lintels were but a part of a more extensive decorative program, now largely lost to us: fragments of stucco reliefs of serpents were found inside the front rooms, along with traces of red, green, and blue paint, while benches inside the rooms



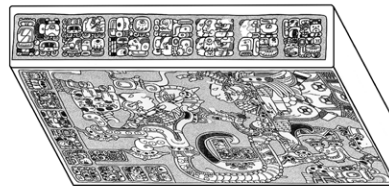
10 Structure 23 and Structure 24, Yaxchilan, viewed from the principal plaza (photograph by Alexei Malyutin)



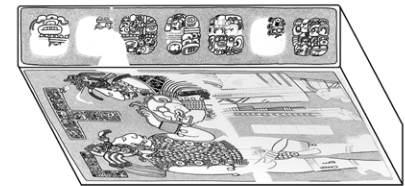
Lintel 23



Lintel 24



Lintel 25



Lintel 26

11 Plan of Structure 23, Yaxchilan, showing the relation of lintel edge and underside texts and the proposed itinerary through the building (diagram by Theodore Watler, after Roberto García Moll, "Shield Jaguar and Structure 23 at Yaxchilan," in *Courty 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], fig. 95; drawings by Ian Graham, © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, PM 2004.15.6.5.21–23, 2004.15.6.5.26, 2004.15.6.5.28, 2004.15.6.7.3–4). The edge text of Lintel 24 is lost; the text from Lintel 25 has been duplicated to give an impression of what the text might originally have looked like.

presented places for sitting, and niches in the walls behind these benches might have provided storage for statues or other objects.⁴⁰ The outside of the building may also have been stuccoed and painted, with a roof comb rising high above, and processions may have paused and made offerings at circular altars outside each plaza-facing door.⁴¹

The carved lintels may have operated fairly independently from the rest of the program, perhaps connected only by theme. This is the case in Bonampak Structure 1, a building dedicated in 791 CE at a small site allied with Yaxchilan, where three carved lintels, a well-preserved interior painting program, and remains of exterior stucco decoration survive. At Bonampak, the lintels over the doors into the three painted rooms each feature a scene of capture (Fig. 12). From left to right, the lintels appear to depict the unfolding collapse of



12 Lintels 1, 2, 3, Structure 1, Bonampak, 791, limestone, carved surfaces approx. 39% × 29½ in. (100 × 75 cm), 37% × 29½ in. (95 × 75 cm), 35% × 29½ in. (90 × 75 cm) (artworks in the public domain; photographs by Hans Ritter, provided by the Bonampak Documentation Project)

a captive being speared by a victorious warrior, yet the texts carved on the lintels reveal that these are the victories of three distinct actors over a span of nearly forty years.⁴² The lintels display the same themes of warfare and rulership stressed in the murals, especially in those of Room 2, but are otherwise fairly independent from the mural program, more closely related to one another than to any figure in the paintings, which are rendered at a scale different from that of the carved lintels. It is quite possible that the lintels of Yaxchilan Structure 23 likewise presented a self-contained dialogue, echoing the same themes as the painted decoration but linked into a tight narrative circuit only with the other lintels.

This was an unusually rich and complex lintel program, even by Yaxchilan standards. No other buildings from Shield Jaguar's reign have so many carved lintels, and the lintels of Structure 23 are unique among the surviving lintels of Yaxchilan in being carved on both their outer edges and their undersides.⁴³ Reuniting the edges and the undersides of lintels, so frequently considered separately or as disembodied texts, and putting them back into their architectural context reveal several key cues to how the program was intended to be read and experienced. Texts and images structure a clear and coherent processional pathway through the dwelling, snaking in and out of its doorways.

The lintels form a unified circuit, which shares characteristic features with other Maya sculptural programs.⁴⁴ Monumental Maya inscriptions have a fairly standard format. They begin with time: an Initial Series date starts off the inscription, opening with a distinctive introductory glyph, followed by a Long Count, which enumerates the days elapsed since the beginning of the present era. The Initial Series also includes an abbreviated Calendar Round date, which locates the event within a fifty-two-year interval, as well as additional information about the moon and other mantic elements. This Initial Series date conventionally forms the anchor for all additional events in the texts, with Distance Numbers constituting a scaffolding to count forward or backward from one event to another. Later dates in the text are usually referenced only by the abbreviated Calendar Round form. The text usually concludes with a record of its own dedication and the titles of the patron or ruler who dedicated the monument. Although no one lintel at Structure 23 has all of these properties, taken as a set, incorporating text and image, the four lintel edges and undersides can be seen to display precisely this form.

13 Lintel 26, Structure 23, Yaxchilan, outer edge, showing the beginning of the textual program of Structure 23, with the Initial Series Introductory Glyph at left (drawing by Ian Graham, © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, PM 2004.16.6.5.25)



First, the program clearly indicates its own starting point. The text on the outer edge of Lintel 26 begins with an Initial Series, the conventional opening of most monumental Maya inscriptions (Fig. 13; the Appendix gives a list of dates and events in the lintel program). This text situates the events narrated in absolute time, on a date corresponding to

14 Lintel 26, Structure 23, Yaxchilan, underside (drawing by Ian Graham, © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, PM 2004.15.6.5.26)



15 Lintel 26, Structure 23, Yaxchilan, underside, detail showing Shield Jaguar wearing the Jester God headdress (artwork in the public domain; photograph © Jorge Pérez de Lara). The date 724 is in the low-relief inscription at upper left.

June 22, 726, in the Julian calendar (9.14.14.13.16 5 Kib 14 Yaxk'in in the Maya calendar), and specifies that on this day, an *och k'ahk'*, or “fire-entering” ritual, dedicated the building (see below).⁴⁵ The presence of the Initial Series date makes it clear that instead of seeing the under-

sides of the lintels from left to right, as has commonly been proposed, the intended reading order begins above the northern, or rightmost door—and it begins, logically enough, on the outer edge, rather than the underside of the lintel, addressing a viewer who is just approaching the building. The unusual round form of the glyphic cartouches on the edge of the lintel draws the viewer’s eye to this opening passage.

If we accept the premise that all of the texts should be read together as a single program, it is equally clear where that program ends (Fig. 21). The underside of Lintel 23, above the sole door on the western side of the building, concludes with a resounding accumulation of titles for Shield Jaguar, the ruler of Yaxchilan, which occupies more than one-quarter of the underside of the lintel. Such a prolonged list of titles for the royal protagonist usually marks the end of a Maya inscription. The last event to be commemorated on the underside text is the same *och k'ahk'* ceremony mentioned at the beginning of the program on the outer edge of Lintel 26. But here, the date is one day later, June 23, 726. This suggests that the ceremonies dedicating Structure 23 were quite extensive, spanning at least two days. Equally important, it bookends the program with a self-referential record of the building’s dedication, again a common feature of monumental Maya inscriptions.⁴⁶

If the program of Structure 23 both begins and ends with the record of its own dedication, what happens in between? Assuming that one has begun, as the architecture prompts, by reading the text on the edge of Lintel 26, above the rightmost doorway on the front of the building, the next logical action is to enter through that door.⁴⁷ The underside of Lintel 26 seems to show Shield Jaguar’s preparations for war: he carries a hafted knife and wears padded or shell armor over his tunic, while Lady Xook proffers his jaguar helmet and long, flexible shield (Figs. 7, 14).

The date of the events on the underside of Lintel 26 has long bedeviled scholars. A text behind Shield Jaguar’s head records a date corresponding to February 9, 724 (12 Eb 0 Pop, or 9.14.12.6.12), which has often been interpreted as the date of the events on the lintel.⁴⁸ Yet the examination of the lintel itself makes it clear that this date falls within a secondary and subsidiary inscription (Fig. 15). Carved in low relief, it is barely perceptible now, and would have been even less legible in the darkened inner corner when the lintel was painted and installed. The date is in fact part of a sculptor’s signature, which records the dedication of the carving of the lintel in 724; it need not be the date of the image represented on it.⁴⁹ Indeed, the prominent T-shaped text at the upper center of the lintel offers a clue to an alternative date and interpretation

for the scene. This text identifies the image of Shield Jaguar at the moment of his accession, an event that took place on October 21, 681.⁵⁰ The image also provides support for this reading: Shield Jaguar wears the royal diadem, the *sak huun*, or “Jester God,” headdress, which is precisely the emblem of rulership that is tied around his brow at the moment of accession



16 Jester God headdress excavated at Aguateca, ca. 600–800, alabaster, $7\frac{7}{8} \times 2\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{4}$ in. ($20 \times 6.5 \times .5$ cm). Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología, Guatemala City, 17.7.64.244 (artwork in the public domain; photograph by Takeshi Inomata, provided by the Aguateca Archaeological Project)

(Fig. 16).⁵¹ The layered allusions to warfare and accession are not mutually exclusive: among both the Maya and the Aztecs, a successful military campaign might be part of a ruler's claim to power.

Activities associated with Shield Jaguar's accession are also depicted on the underside of the central Lintel 25 (Figs. 6, 17). Here, text indicates that the conjuring of the deity represented in the scene took place on 5 Imix 4 Mak, an abbreviated Calendar Round date readily identifiable to anyone in the Yaxchilan realm as the date of Shield Jaguar's accession in October 681. Because of the interconnected floor plan of Structure 23, it would be possible to continue moving through the building and exit through the central door, seeing the underside of Lintel 25 before its outer edge (Fig. 11).

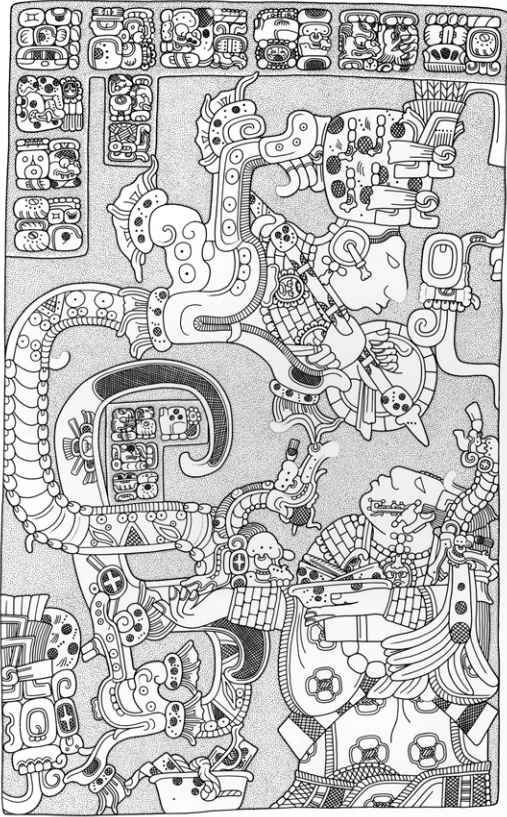
This is an inversion of typical viewing order, but two cues suggest that the inversion is foreseen and intended. First, text on the underside of Lintel 25 is written in mirror writing, a feature that often signals a divergence from the normal order of reading while simultaneously alluding to the contingent and uncanny nature of the conjured vision (see above).⁵² Second, the text on the outer edge of Lintel 25 begins with a Distance Number, signaling a continuation of a text begun elsewhere—and the Distance Number explicitly counts forward from the date of the conjuring event on the underside of the lintel, strongly implying that the outer text follows the inner one (Fig. 18). The Distance Number counts forward approximately forty-two years to the dedication of the carving of the dwelling on August 2, 723 (3 Imix 14 Ch'en, or 9.14.11.15.1).⁵³ The dedication statement names Lady Xook (perhaps in the guise of a supernatural) as the owner of the building, and the final phrase stresses that the dedication takes place under the auspices of Shield Jaguar.

So far, the program has developed some interesting properties. The edges of Lintels 26 and 25 refer to the dedication of the building and its components, and the undersides show royal rituals associated with Shield Jaguar's accession, in which Lady Xook, the patron of the building, played a prominent role. Thus, during the first circuit through the building, passing from the underside of Lintel 26 to the underside of Lintel 25, the viewer remains in the past, at the time of Shield Jaguar's accession in 681. At the same time, the viewer permitted into the building sees intimate scenes of royal women's ritual, whereas the outer edge texts allude only to the public fact of the building's dedication.

The carving on the outer edge of Lintel 24 is unfortunately destroyed, but it is likely that it was read next in sequence, and it may have also recorded information about the dedication of the building, in keeping with the other texts on the outer edges of the lintels. Normal reading order is restored as one moves from outside to the inside. The underside of Lintel 24 represents a scene of bloodletting and penance that took place on October 25, 709 (5 Eb 15 Mak, or 9.13.17.15.12; Figs. 5, 19).⁵⁴ The second entry into the building takes the viewer into the past again, albeit to a different past moment.

Afterward, one exits the building again. The carved program offers no directives, but one possibility is to proceed through the interior door connecting the front to the rear chambers and leave through the door on the southeast rear corner, passing underneath an undecorated lintel.⁵⁵ From there, one could continue the clockwise circuit of the structure around to the northwest doorway, which houses the purely textual Lintel 23 (Fig. 2). Here, the text begins on the outer edge of the lintel, which records the dedication or raising of the doorway on March 17, 724 (9.14.12.8.9 10 Muluk 17 Wo; Fig. 20).⁵⁶ This dedication statement is followed by an extensive statement about Lady Xook and other members of the Xook lineage who attended the dedication of the building.⁵⁷

The text then proceeds to the underside of Lintel 23, which records two events (Fig. 21). First, a Distance Number counts forward 106 days to February 27, 726



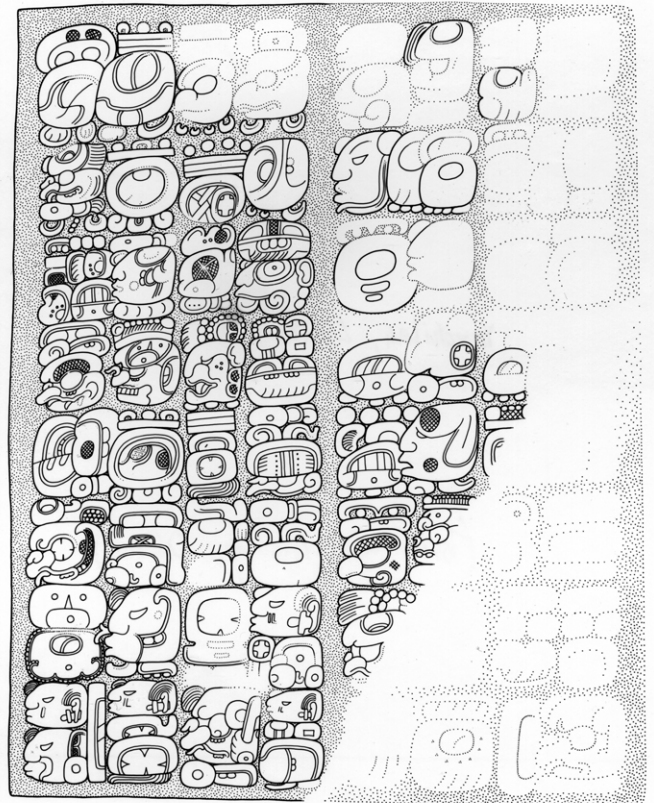
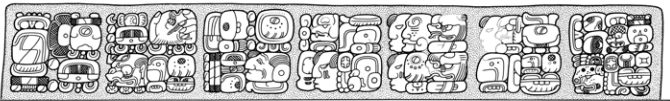
17 Lintel 25, Structure 23, Yaxchilan underside
(drawing by Ian Graham, © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, PM 2004.15.6.5.22)

18 Lintel 25, Structure 23, Yaxchilan, outer edge
(drawing by Ian Graham, © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, PM 2004.15.6.5.23)

19 Lintel 24, Structure 23, Yaxchilan, underside
(drawing by Ian Graham, © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, PM 2004.15.6.5.21)

20 Lintel 23, Structure 23, Yaxchilan, outer edge
(drawing by Ian Graham, © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, PM 2004.15.6.7.3)

21 Lintel 23, Structure 23, Yaxchilan, underside
(drawing by Ian Graham, © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, PM 2004.15.6.7.4)



(9.14.14.8.1 7 Imix 19 Pop), when Shield Jaguar celebrated the forty-fifth anniversary of his accession.⁵⁸ The text concludes by recording the fire-entering dedication ceremony (*och k'abk'*) of the structure on June 23, 726 (9.14.14.13.17 6 Kaban 15 Yaxk'in). Just one day later than the fire-entering ceremony recorded at the beginning of the program on the outer edge of Lintel 26, it suggests that the ceremonies dedicating Structure 23 were quite extensive. The text concludes, as many Maya inscriptions do, with a litany of titles for the king, in this case, Shield Jaguar.

Considered as a cohesive program, the four carved lintels of Structure 23 have powerful and surprising properties. The viewer shifts between images of the past, pictured on the undersides of the three front lintels, and the present moment of dedication, the subject of the lintel edge texts and the purely textual Lintel 23. Dedicatory rites are given special emphasis on the outer edges of the lintels, where they are the principal subject of the texts: the public presentation of the building emphasized these rituals even to those who could not enter inside.⁵⁹ They disclose relatively self-evident, unprivileged information: the building exists, therefore it must have been dedicated, and its patron is given credit for her generosity (which, of course, happened under the auspices of her royal husband). This public information contrasts sharply with the content of the images on the undersides of the plaza-facing lintels, which feature private rituals in which elite women participated in the past. The building segments its audience, presenting different information to those outside and those permitted to enter.

Furthermore, the Structure 23 program thus both begins and ends with the dedication of the building itself—a frequent focus of Maya texts, as David Stuart has noted.⁶⁰ This kind of bookending—or, more formally, chiasmus—is a rhetorical structure familiar from modern Maya oral performance and from sacred texts such as the seventeenth-century *Popol Vuh*.⁶¹ In chiasmus, the first element echoes the last, the second element the penultimate, and so on, forming an ABCB'A' structure. Here is an example from the *Popol Vuh* that illustrates the pattern:

First therefore was created	Nab'e k'ut xwinaqir
Earth,	Ulew,
Mountains, valleys,	Juyub', taq'aj,
Divided were its paths water,	Xch'ob'och'ox u b'e ja',
Made their way were their branches	Xb'inije'ik k'oleje' raqan
Among mountains.	Xo'l taq juyub'.
Merely divided then existed water,	Xa ch'ob'ol chik xek'oje' wi ja',
Then were revealed great mountains.	Ta xk'utunije'ik nima'q juyub'.
Thus its creation earth this,	Keje' k'ut u winaqirik ulew ri',
Then it was created by them	Ta xwinaqirik kumal ⁶²

Chiasmus occurs occasionally in Classic Maya inscriptions,⁶³ but significantly, it is one of the few poetic devices that might be transferrable to programs involving images as well as words. We are just beginning to recognize the ways in which chiastic structures are also displayed by Classic Maya works of art, among them the murals of Structure 1 at Bonampak, where the three painted rooms establish a series of such patterns: day-night-day, dance-war-dance, present-past-present.⁶⁴

At Structure 23, three paired events bracket the text (Appendix). First is the dedication of the building itself, which begins and ends the text. Within that pairing, another pair consists of the accession of Shield Jaguar, depicted on the undersides of Lintels 26 and 25, and the commemoration of the anniversary of his accession on the underside of Lintel 23. Within that, secondary dedication events (the dedication of the carving on the outer edge of Lintel 25, and the dedication of the doorway on the outer edge of Lintel 23) form a third chiastic pairing. What is striking at Structure 23 is the way that text and image are granted equal status in this program; note, for example, how the purely textual record of the anniversary of Shield Jaguar's accession on Lintel 23 is paired with images of that significant moment on Lintels 26 and 25, where the texts are subsidiary and, in some cases, little more than captions. Significantly, many of the later lintel programs at Yaxchilan, especially those commissioned by Bird Jaguar IV (r. 752–68), also display chiastic structure, perhaps following the example of the Structure 23 program.⁶⁵

Most important, the lintel texts guide a processional circuit through the dwelling, allowing us to imagine its active use during commemorative ritual (Fig. 11). Processions, especially circumambulatory ones, were and continue to be a central aspect of Mesoamerican religious practice. For example, Megan O'Neil has demonstrated that reading the inscriptions on many Piedras Negras stelae required their circumambulation in a counterclockwise direction, a ritually charged movement that may have activated and enlivened the words carved on them.⁶⁶ Strikingly, at Yaxchilan Structure 23, the circuit is clockwise, rather than the counterclockwise direction traditionally preferred by Mesoamerican ritual specialists. However, as Patricia McAnany and Shannon Plank have argued, such an inversion of traditional practice may be indicative of women's ritual, as Gary Gossen has observed in processions of female saints in modern Chamula.⁶⁷ It may also be specific to Yaxchilan: O'Neil has proposed that Yaxchilan Structure 12 also has a clockwise reading order.⁶⁸ At Structure 23, the processional circuit begins in relatively public view on the plaza-facing side and concludes on the more sheltered and private southwest side, out of view.

The program as a whole is rich and allusive, and it demands much of the viewer: not just careful looking and reading but also feats of memory and a particular spatial and performative engagement with the structure. The entire program can never be seen at once; it exists only in the mind of the engaged and knowledgeable viewer. Whether its ambition was habitually realized is doubtful, and not just because of the difficulties of seeing the lintels: the circuit is only recommended, not rigidly enforced by the architecture. The multiple doors allowed for numerous possibilities of entrance and exit, and people surely interacted with Structure 23 in many ways, creating their own itineraries through the structure and drawing their own conclusions about its decorative program. Yet if there were one moment when this circuit was likely to have been performed, it would have been at the building's dedication. So close to the time of its making, the artists, priests, and patrons involved with the commission would still have been attentive to its performative intricacies. Crucially, the circuit through the building may have guided precisely the kind of ritual for which the building was created.

RITUAL AND DEDICATION

The texts of Structure 23 describe several different kinds of ritual observances. Some were calendrical, such as the period ending 9.14.15.0.0 (or September 14, 726) commemorated on Altar 7, likely placed in front of Structure 23's central doorway.⁶⁹ The *45-tun*, or 45 × 360 days, anniversary of Shield Jaguar's accession was another significant celebration that might have taken place near the building. But most of the rituals recorded here concern the making and dedication of the structure itself. Such self-reflexivity is far from uncommon in Maya texts.

On the contrary, as Stuart writes, “Dedicatory inscriptions . . . constitute the largest body of Maya inscriptions on both monumental and portable media.”⁷⁰

In eighth-century Yaxchilan, Structure 23 is relatively unusual in recording its own dedication on its lintel texts.⁷¹ But elsewhere in the Maya world, the practice was quite common. Some of the earliest surviving lintels from Oxkintok seem to bear fragments of similar dedicatory statements; the ninth-century lintels of the Monjas structure at Chichen Itza likewise record their own dedication, and again list the owners of the dedicated structures as deities, in relationship to noblewomen of the site—all acting under the auspices of Chichen Itza’s ruler.⁷² Not just building a structure, but also recording the act of building remained of great importance in the sixteenth century, after the Spanish invasion. Diego de Landa reported practices of inscription and dedication during the festival of Oc Na in the month of Chen or Yax: “if it was necessary, they rebuilt the house, or renovated it, and they placed on the wall the memorial of those things, written in their characters.”⁷³

The Structure 23 lintels are exceptionally preoccupied with dedication events, even by the standards of Maya inscriptions: six different acts of dedication are recorded on the Structure 23 lintels, and a seventh might have been the subject of the now-lost outer edge of Lintel 24 (Appendix). Three different kinds of dedicatory actions occur in a distinct chronological sequence, spanning a period of three years from 723 to 726, indicating that the making and dedication of a dwelling could be a protracted process, with many moments for celebration and ritual.⁷⁴ The activities commemorated at Structure 23 are denoted by the verbs *ʼabayi*, *kʼal*, and *och kʼahkʼ*, the very richness of the vocabulary suggesting practices of great importance.

First came three acts of *ʼabayi*, a verb that seems to designate a physical act of raising or elevation, with a wider connotation of offering or dedication.⁷⁵ In the case of Structure 23, it is specifically the “carving” (possibly *-uxul*, though the decipherment remains contested) that is elevated and dedicated. In all three cases, carving is possessed, but each inscription lists a different owner. In the inscription on the outer edge of Lintel 25, the carving is said to belong to the dwelling, or *otoot*, which in turn belongs to Lady Xook, perhaps in the guise of a supernatural (see below).⁷⁶ The other two *ʼabayi* inscriptions, carved in inconspicuous low relief on the undersides of Lintels 26 and 24, fit the pattern of sculptors’ signatures known elsewhere in the Maya region.⁷⁷ The next kind of dedicatory act is more specific to architecture. The outer edge of Lintel 23 records the dedication of the doorway of Lady Xook’s dwelling on March 17, 724 (*kʼalwani u pasil yotoot ix akʼin xook* [it is raised, the doorway, of her dwelling, Lady Akʼin Xook]; Fig. 20).⁷⁸ This was apparently a well-attended event, which Lady Xook presided over in the company of (*yitab*) at least two other women of the Xook lineage, one of whom was likely her mother.⁷⁹

Most important are the two inscriptions that record the *och kʼahkʼ* or fire-entering ceremony that vitalized the building on June 22 and 23, 726.⁸⁰ By comparison with modern Maya ritual, it seems likely that this ceremony was a necessary prelude to the use of a dwelling, one that fed and ensouled the building, incorporating it into the social order.⁸¹ Among the modern Zinacantan Maya, the *chʼul kantela*, or “holy candle,” ceremony is performed after a house is built but before it is occupied. A *hʼilol*, or shaman, leads the family in processions, prayers, offerings, and the sharing of a ritual meal. The *chʼul kantela* ceremony compensates the Earth Lords for the materials taken from their domain to build the house and gives the building its animate soul. Offerings of music, flowers, incense, candles, and chicken broth and blood feed the walls, roof, and four corner posts of the house; the family moves in procession through the house and the surrounding landscape, asking for the favor of ancestral deities in establishing the new dwelling. Stuart proposes that the ancient Maya ceremony

may also have involved bestowing a proper name on the dwelling, another way of bringing a building into being as an animate entity.⁸² And, indeed, very damaged passages on the outer edge of Lintel 26 and the underside of Lintel 23 seem to give names for Structure 23.

What is crucial about the *ch'ul kantela* ceremony, and, by analogy, the Classic Maya *och k'abk'* rite, is that it moves in and out of the house, circling it, but also moving through each door and room: that is, it enacts precisely the kind of circuit proposed by the lintel program of Structure 23. We might imagine that the lintel texts might have been read aloud on such an occasion, and we can imagine the chiasmic structure of the text resonating with those of other prayers made at the event.⁸³ If the performative ambition of the lintel program were ever to have been realized, surely it would have been at the dedication ceremony. Perhaps the whole carefully conceptualized program was created simply for this moment of performance. The key is that viewing in this moment would have been embodied, in motion, and multisensory, accompanied by prayers, music, incense, feasting, and ritual bloodletting.

There are even hints that deity impersonations were among the ritual performances undertaken at the building's dedication. Structure 23 may well have been intended to be the dwelling of a deity, its very creation an act of piety and devotion. The underside text of Lintel 23 specifies that the (now undecipherable) name of the dwelling itself is holy (?? *u kuh k'aaba yotoot* [?? its holy name house]; Fig. 21). The name of the immediate owner of the dwelling is obscure, but several glyph blocks seem to name an aspect of the moon goddess and include an upturned-pot title associated with supernaturals before shading into the familiar names and titles of Lady Xook.⁸⁴ The implication is that Lady Xook might have accepted the dedication of the building during a ritual embodiment of the deity who was its owner, assuming that goddess's aspect through costume and ritual performance.⁸⁵

Indeed, it may be the ritual that matters here, far more than the object itself. As Stuart writes, "The essential function of such dedication texts is to mark the political, social, or ritual activation of an object or monument."⁸⁶ This seems clearest in the case of a Maya stela, where the inscription may detail historical exploits but almost always culminates with the record of its own dedication.⁸⁷ It seems possible to understand the stela simply as a residue of ritual, the stone remainder of a ceremony of dedication and cyclical closure that mattered far more than any subsequent acts of viewing. That plain, uncarved stelae could substitute for elaborately worked stones only emphasizes this point.⁸⁸ Similarly, some great works of Maya art are notoriously unfinished. Reserved spaces for captions in the Bonampak murals were left unfilled, the feet barely roughed out on an exquisitely carved panel from Palenque, now at Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC.⁸⁹ It was possible to go back and finish the work, but no one did—as if once past a certain point, such as the ceremony of dedication, the work's state of completion and the satisfaction of its future viewers no longer mattered.

This is a challenge that art historians cannot ignore. Certainly, artists and patrons plotted elaborate concepts and gazed with admiration as the work took shape in the workshop, where nuance and detail were easy to see. But once the lintels went out into the world, they were no longer so simple to admire. Not everyone could look closely, and not everyone did. This is not a call to discard our discipline's fundamental tools but rather to remember that in looking closely—often assisted by museums and technologies utterly foreign to the moment of the works we now construe as "art"—we must be attentive to whose kind of looking we are replicating and, equally, whose kinds of looking we exclude. At the same time, we must seek ways to explore ancient viewing experiences. In the reception of the Structure 23 lintels, we see evidence that the lintels were highly visible, but only imperfectly so.

ECHOES OF STRUCTURE 23

Structure 23's program was tremendously influential at Yaxchilan, giving rise to many emulations in subsequent decades. In the distance between model and copies, we can see some of the tensions inherent in the lintel format—for it may be that the Structure 23 lintels were not always viewed as thoroughly as their makers intended. It is not that the program of Structure 23 could not or was not meant to be seen—on the contrary, the program thoughtfully guides movement through the dwelling, all the while commenting on the difficulties of its own viewing. Later echoes of the program of Structure 23 on lintels from Yaxchilan demonstrate that the lintels *were* seen and emulated. Yet these later emulations may suggest that the lintels could not be observed closely enough for many of their subtleties to be appreciated.

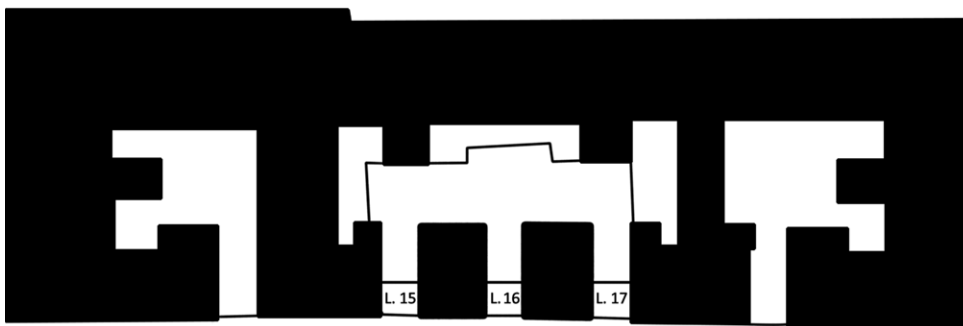
In particular, some of the features that most explicitly specified movement, such as the carving on both edge and underside of the lintels, are not repeated on later Yaxchilan lintels, and the sinuous in-and-out pattern encouraged by Structure 23 is replaced by simpler forms of interaction in later construction projects. Comparing the Structure 23 programs

to its echoes in the commissions of three of Shield Jaguar's successors also reveals a shifting conception of the meaning of the lintel genre. Over the course of the eighth century, the carved stone lintel becomes an increasingly pro forma gesture, conceptually obligatory for certain kinds of buildings, but not expected to be a site of active, engaged looking.

Take, for example, the program of Structure 21, a structure consciously modeled on Structure 23 but built nearly a generation later by Shield Jaguar's son Bird Jaguar IV (likely Yaxun Bahlam, r. 752–68). The lintels of Structure 21 have their own compositional logic: clustered over the doorways of the central room of a simple three-room structure, they create a chiasmic composition where images of sacrifice bracket Bird Jaguar's military success (Fig. 22). This reordering of the Structure 23 lintels creates an effective program, but one

that is much simpler than its prototype. There is no clear starting or ending point, such as an Initial Series date; the lintels are carved only on their undersides; and any trajectory through the building is equally valid. Squarish and irregularly shaped, these lintels would have spanned smaller doorways, with correspondingly less illumination; the maximum depth of relief is only about $\frac{3}{8}$ inch (1 centimeter), resulting in a substantial reduction in visibility from the deep carving of the Structure 23 lintels.⁹⁰

The figural lintels cite the Structure 23 program but retreat from many of its most powerful innovations. On Lintel 15, the dynamic curve of the serpent looming over Lady Xook has been replaced by a more sedate and decorous composition, featuring one of Bird Jaguar's wives (Fig. 23). Vision and conjurer stay confined to their respective halves of the lintel, separated by a vertical bar of text. Their gazes do not meet. Likewise, the central Lintel 16 replaces the intimate scene of Lady Xook assisting Shield Jaguar in donning his warlike garments with a more conventional image of Bird Jaguar standing over a kneeling captive, an image familiar from stelae and other monuments, reconfigured only in squaring it for this less vertical space



Lintel 15



Lintel 16



Lintel 17

22 Structure 21, Yaxchilan, and its lintels, Lintels 15, 16, and 17 (plan by Theodore Watler, after Roberto García Moll, *La arquitectura de Yaxchilán* [Mexico City: Conaculta and Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2003], fig. 20; drawings by Ian Graham, © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, PM 204.15.6.5.14–.16)

(Fig. 22). Lady Xook's dramatic bloodletting on Lintel 24 is domesticated into a scene of double penance, where Bird Jaguar sits on the right, letting blood from his penis, while Lady Mut Bahlam, another royal consort, kneels to the left, drawing a rope through her tongue (Fig. 22). It is a clear citation of Lintel 24, which has again replaced compositional power with symmetry and restraint, reasserting the king's authority over the women of his court.

The gulf between the Structure 23 and Structure 21 programs might be explained by a deficit in the skill of the artists, or by a paucity of imagination caused by the rushed pace of sculptural commission during Bird Jaguar's reign. It might also be the result of a search for a more deliberate simplicity and clarity after the excesses of Structure 23. Yet might it also signal a failure to engage with Structure 23 on anything more than a

superficial level? The Structure 21 lintels have taken from Structure 23 the impressions of the glance rather than the insights of the sustained gaze. The result is a work that may be even more amenable to casual looking than its prototype—but surface viewing is privileged over close engagement.

Later echoes of the program are even fainter. Structure 20, dedicated by Shield Jaguar IV (r. 769–ca. 800) sometime after 771, compresses many of his illustrious father's and grandfather's architectural and sculptural accomplishments into a single program: a hieroglyphic stair and reset stelae evoke Shield Jaguar III's Structure 44, while the vision serpent imagery on Lintels 13 and 14 (Fig. 24) cites both Bird Jaguar's Lintel 15 and Lady Xook's Lintel 25 (Figs. 6, 23).⁹¹ Here, the compositions have become crowded with multiple figures, not just royal wives but also subordinate lords who grew in power during Yaxchilan's final years.⁹² The relief is deeper than that of the Structure 21 lintels,⁹³ but legibility has ceded place to an overall richness of surface that dazzles the peripheral glance.

The final iteration of the vision serpent appears in Structure 88, a small and shoddily built construction dedicated during the reign of K'inich Tatbu Skull IV, sometime after 800, that is now little more than “a small pile of rocks.”⁹⁴ Between the low relief carving and the poor and uneven quality of the stone, the vision serpent is scarcely legible in its only decorated lintel, Lintel 55 (Fig. 25).⁹⁵ There are no texts. The royal woman sits just below the king, holding out a vessel full of blood-stained paper as she facilitates his encounter with the figure that the serpent disgorges. The undulating serpent's body is scarcely distinguishable from the woman's patterned garment, perhaps a clever play on the tight relationship of woman and vision, but more likely a flaw in the lintel's conception and execution. All the



23 Lintel 15, Structure 21, Yaxchilan, ca. 755, limestone, 34½ × 32½ × 4¼ in. (87.6 × 82.6 × 10.7 cm). British Museum, London (artwork in the public domain; photograph by the author)

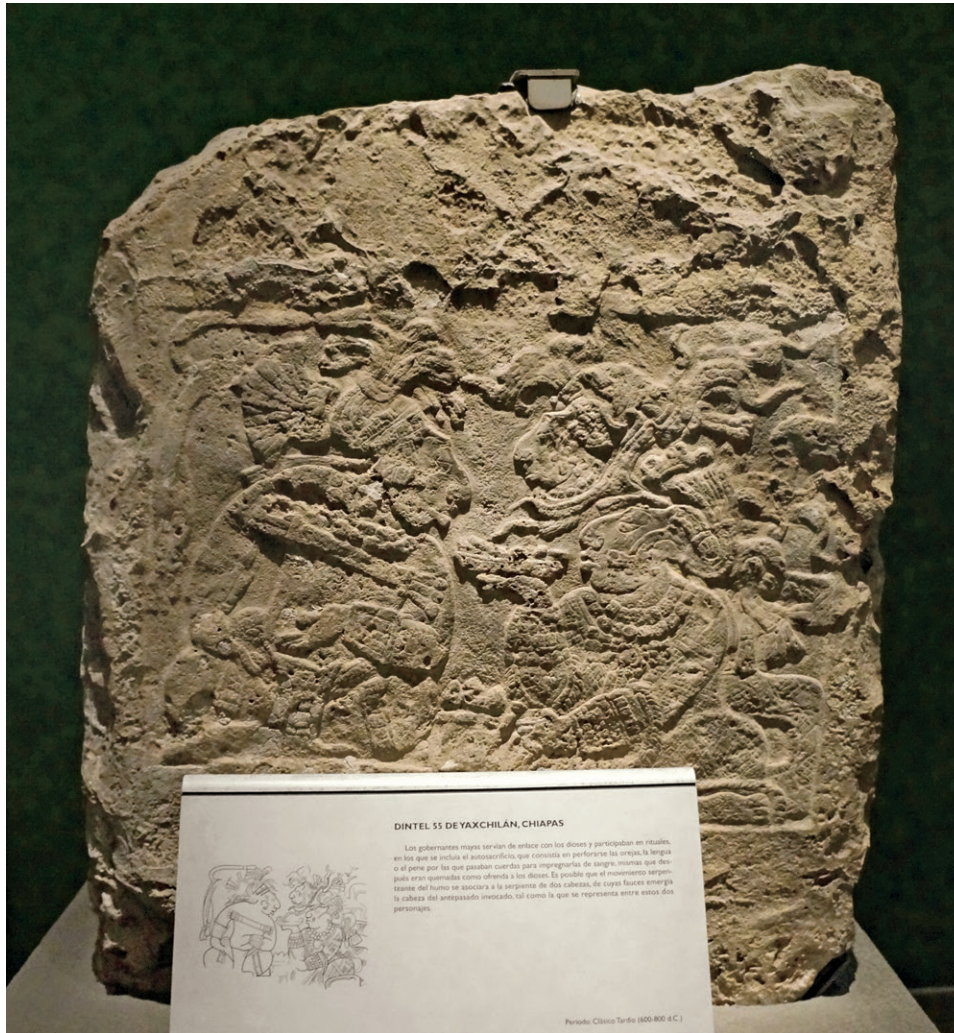


24 Lintel 14, Structure 20, Yaxchilan, in situ, ca. 770–800, limestone, carved surface $30\frac{3}{4} \times 31\frac{1}{2} \times 12\frac{5}{8}$ in. ($78 \times 80 \times 32$ cm) (artwork in the public domain; photograph by the author)

subversive potential energy of Lady Xook's solitary encounter with the divine has been scrubbed out of this scene—yet it clearly refers back to it.

There is a kind of glorious futility to the lintel as a site of political rhetoric. As lintels came to be carved in lower and lower relief, their casts of actors and claims of authority grew more complex in the waning years of Maya power. But who could see these images, read these texts, and understand their rhetoric? Many of the later lintels at Yaxchilan are frankly puzzling as carvings. Their flat surfaces, low relief, and rotated picture planes make no concessions to the standing viewer; their execution is sometimes almost sloppy. Their subjects become repetitive and formulaic, expecting a passive, confirmatory glance rather than active engagement.

But perhaps even this presumes too much of the viewer. What the eye sees first is, quite simply, opulence, as Beat Brenk has argued was also the case in many Byzantine churches.⁹⁶ Carved lintels were typically part of larger painted, stuccoed, and sculptured decorative programs. We have an idea of what these programs might have looked like from Bonampak Structure 1, where every available surface, from bench risers to shadowy vault capstones, was covered in painted decoration.⁹⁷ In this context, there is a particular extravagance to carving the lintel, knowing full well that the resulting effort would be hard to see. Some viewers might not even know to look up and would pass underneath, unaware. How rich, powerful, and pious the patron must be to ornament even these unlikely surfaces. To go to the expense of carving here, rather than simply and cheaply painting, is greater extravagance still. If this was indeed a god's house, such extravagant ornament, and the labor it represents, is another gift to the gods, whose faculties of perception are not limited in the way that



25 Lintel 55, Structure 88, Yaxchilan, ca. 800–808, limestone, carved surface 31½ × 23⅝ × 7⅞ in. (80 × 60 × 20 cm). Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City (artwork in the public domain; photograph by the author)

human vision is. Carved lintels also make claims about elite sight: *you* struggle to decipher the scene and its protagonists, but the keen-eyed king sees clearly and knows the entire story.

Perhaps this, then, is the answer to the self-defeating nature of the lintel as a site for sculpture: seeing simply did not matter. The rituals surrounding the dedication of Structure 23 were numerous and protracted, spanning a period of over three years. They could be quite elaborate: the *och k'abk'* ceremony itself lasted at least two days. These dedication ceremonies likely involved blood offerings, ritual feasts, and deity impersonations. They were grand and expensive celebrations that demonstrated the owners' power and piety. What mattered most was the making of the lintel and the building of the dwelling, so that it could be presented to the gods in an elaborate ceremony of dedication. Perhaps all viewing was secondary to acts of making and dedicating the work itself, as Wu Hung and Robert Sharf have suggested was the case for Buddhist paintings in the dimly lit caves of Dunhuang, China.⁹⁸ Recall that Structure 23's owner is Lady Xook, but possibly in the guise of a moon goddess, so that building it, a dwelling for a deity, may have been an act of piety in itself. If so, the subsequent history of Yaxchilan Structure 23—all the intricacies of its program and its later simplified repetitions—may matter far less than the sheer existence of the building. Looking was a side effect of making, not its principal goal.

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Appendix

EVENTS RECORDED IN THE TEXTS OF THE STRUCTURE 23 LINTELS, YAXCHILAN

These events are presented according to the circuit through the building proposed in the text. Dates in parentheses are calculated from Calendar Rounds and Distance Numbers. Note that the Initial Series Long Count date is also reconstructed where the text is damaged, indicated by an asterisk (*). The Julian dates were generated using the 584286 Martin-Skimore correlation. Texts in blue are dedication events, and the final column indicates the chiasmic pairings within the lintel program. Day and month names are those used in the Yucatan during the sixteenth century; eighth-century voicings of the same hieroglyphs may have differed in some cases.

Lintel	Position	Long Count	Calendar Round	Julian Date	Event	Translation	Chiasmus
Lintel 26	edge	*9.14.14.13.16	5 Kib 14 Yaxk'in	June 22, 726	<i>och k'abk'</i>	dedication: fire-entering	A
Lintel 26	underside	(9.14.12.6.12)	12 Eb o Pop	February 9, 724	<i>t'abayi yuxul? K'awiil Chabk, aj sak ook</i>	dedication: <i>t'abayi</i> + sculptor's signature	
Lintel 26	underside	(9.12.9.8.1)	(5 Imix 4 Mak)	[October 21, 681]		accession (?)	B
Lintel 25	underside	(9.12.9.8.1)	5 Imix 4 Mak	October 21, 681	<i>tz'ak</i>	conjuring on date of Shield Jaguar's accession	B
Lintel 25	edge	(9.14.11.15.1)	3 Imix 14 Ch'en	August 2, 723	<i>t'abayi yuxul?il yotoot</i>	dedication: <i>t'abayi</i> of the carving of the dwelling	C
Lintel 24	edge	LOST	LOST	LOST	LOST	LOST	
Lintel 24	underside	(9.13.17.15.12)	5 Eb 15 Mak	October 25, 709	<i>ch'ab</i>	penance/bloodletting	
Lintel 24	underside	no date given			<i>t'abayi yuxul? Mo' Chabk, aj ??</i>	dedication: <i>t'abayi</i> + sculptor's signature	
Lintel 23	edge	(9.14.12.8.9)	10 Muluk 17 Wo	March 17, 724	<i>k'alwani u pasil yotoot</i>	dedication: doorway raised	C
Lintel 23	underside	(9.14.14.8.1)	7 Imix 19 Pop	February 27, 726		45th anniversary of accession	B'
Lintel 23	underside	(9.14.14.13.17)	6 Kaban 15 Yaxk'in	June 23, 726	<i>och k'abk'</i>	dedication: fire-entering	A'

NOTES

Research for this essay was supported by a faculty fellowship from the Franke Institute for the Humanities at the University of Chicago; James Chandler and the other fellows provided helpful comments on an early draft, as did colleagues at the Midwest Conference on Mesoamerican Archaeology and Ethnohistory, especially Joel Palka and Kerry Hull. At the Research on Art and Visual Evidence workshop at the University of Chicago, graduate students and colleagues also offered many exceptionally helpful questions and responses. I am especially grateful to Wu Hung, Richard Neer, and Megan Sullivan for their astute feedback. Mary Miller and Stephen Houston were, as always, extraordinarily generous with their comments on the text. All errors that remain are my own.

All transcriptions and transliterations are from the Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions website, <https://www.peabody.harvard.edu/cmhi/detail.php?num=26&site=Yaxchilan&type=Lintel>, with modifications by the author. All dates are Julian, using the 584286 Skidmore-Martin correlation. Hieroglyphic writing is represented here with the following conventions: logographs are represented in bold capital letters, syllabic transliterations in bold, and transcriptions in italics.

1. The bibliography on the lintels of Yaxchilan Structure 23 is extensive. See especially Roberto García Moll, *La arquitectura de Yaxchilán* (Mexico City: Conaculta and Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2003), 173–83; idem, “Shield Jaguar and Structure 23 at Yaxchilan,” in *Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya*, ed. Mary Miller and Simon Martin (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 268–70; Ian Graham and Eric von Euw, *Yaxchilan*, Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions, vol. 3, pt. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 1977), 53–58; Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube, *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens*, 2nd ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008), 125–26; Peter Mathews, *La escultura de Yaxchilán* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1997), 153–61; Patricia A. McAnany and Shannon Plank, “Perspectives on Actors, Gender Roles, and Architecture at Classic Maya Courts and Households,” in *Royal Courts of the Ancient Maya*, vol. 1, *Theory, Comparison, and Synthesis*, ed. Takeshi Inomata and Stephen D. Houston (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 84–129; Miller and Martin, *Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya*, 99–101, 106–9; Sandra L. Orellana, “Yaxchilán Structure 23: The House of Ix K’ab’al Xok,” in *Fanning the Sacred Flame: Mesoamerican Studies in Honor of H. B. Nicholson*, ed. Matthew A. Boxt and Brian D. Dillon (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2012), 173–210; Linda Schele and Mary Ellen Miller, *The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art* (New York: George Braziller in association with the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, 1986), 177–78, 186–88; Linda Schele and David Freidel, *A Forest of Kings: The Untold Story of the Ancient Maya* (New York: William Morrow, 1990), 265–71; Shannon Plank, “Monumental Maya Dwellings in the Hieroglyphic and Archaeological Records: A Cognitive-Anthropological Approach to Classic Maya Architecture” (PhD diss.,

Boston University, 2003), 100–141; idem, *Maya Dwellings in Hieroglyphs and Archaeology: An Integrative Approach to Ancient Architecture and Spatial Cognition*, B.A.R. International Series 1324 (Oxford: John and Erica Hedges, 2004), 36–54; and Carolyn E. Tate, *Yaxchilán: The Design of a Maya Ceremonial City* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 42–46, 88–91, 119–23, 203–8. Early accounts are found in Désiré Charnay, *Les anciennes villes du Nouveau Monde: Voyages d’explorations au Mexique et dans l’Amérique centrale* (Paris: Hachette, 1885), 392–99; Teobert Maler, *Researches in the Central Portion of the Usumatsintla Valley: Reports of Explorations for the Museum 1897–1900*, Memoirs of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, vol. 2, no. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 1901), 151–53; and Alfred P. Maudslay, *Biologia Centrali-Americana, or, Contributions to the Knowledge of the Fauna and Flora of Mexico and Central America: Archaeology*, 6 vols. (London: Dulen, 1889–1902), 5:45. Additional early bibliography may be found in Sylvanus G. Morley, *The Inscriptions of Petén*, 5 vols., publication 437 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1937–38), 2:482–97.

2. Alfred Percival Maudslay brought Lintel 24 to the British Museum in 1882, and his assistant, Grigorio López, returned to Yaxchilan a year later to extract Lintel 25. López cut apart the edge and underside of Lintel 25, thinning both for shipping; the underside is now on display at the British Museum, and the edge resides in museum storage. (Maudslay lamented that an earlier explorer, Edwin Rockstroh, had destroyed the outer edge of Lintel 24 in his attempt to remove it from the site; cited in Graham and von Euw, *Yaxchilan*, 54). Lintel 26, first photographed by Teobert Maler in 1901, had been broken when it fell in antiquity and was left at the site, to be brought to the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City in 1964. The purely textual Lintel 23, located over the side doorway, was found during excavations led by Roberto García Moll in 1979 and replaced over the reconstructed side doorway of Structure 23 at the site.

3. There is no good way to look at a Maya lintel in its original architectural context; it exists in a liminal space where stopping to look closely is discouraged by the architecture. The doorway is usually not far above the head of an average Maya viewer; in order to look closely at the lintel, one must stand in the doorway, obstructing both light and passage, and crane one’s neck. The situation is even more complicated at sites like Yaxchilan and Bonampak, where the figures on the lintel are parallel to the exterior walls of the building; the viewer must turn 90 degrees in the doorway to be aligned with the figures. The posture is uncomfortable, and the view is still partial and distorted. Tempting though it is to lie flat on one’s back on the threshold to see the lintel as a whole, this, too, is unsatisfactory: it places the viewer at least five feet away from the carving, too far away to read some of the less prominent texts or to appreciate the subtle details of the scene. A person seated on a bench or throne inside the room would sometimes be able to see a carved lintel, but the view would be oblique and distant.

4. Wei-Cheng Lin, “Performing Center: Multistoried Pagodas in China’s Middle Period,” *Ars Orientalis* 46 (2016): 101–34.

5. Plank, “Monumental Maya Dwellings,” 408–10; Stephen D. Houston et al., “Sun, Night, Earth + Stone: The Politics of Belief on a Classic Maya Lintel,” in *A Maya Universe in Stone*, ed. Houston (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, in press). I am grateful to Stephen Houston for sharing his thoughts on the term (personal communication, 2017).

6. The majority of the remaining carved Maya lintels are carved on their undersides (98 out of an imperfect sample of 157, or 62 percent); another 29 are carved on both underside and outer edge (18 percent); 26 are carved on the outer edge alone (17 percent); and four lintels are carved on their undersides and inner and outer edges (a wooden lintel from the Upper Temple of the Jaguars at Chichen Itza and three lintels from Xculoc). Surviving carved lintels are concentrated in three distinct regions: the Yucatan Peninsula, the central Peten heartland, and the Usumacinta River area. It seems that carving lintels may have been a choice, one made by some constellations of Maya cities but not by others, although the sparse preservation of wooden lintels may distort this picture.

7. Stephen D. Houston, “Classic Maya Depictions of the Built Environment,” in *Function and Meaning in Classic Maya Architecture*, ed. Houston (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1998), 343.

8. David Stuart, “Kings of Stone: A Consideration of Stelae in Ancient Maya Ritual and Representations,” *Res* 29–30 (1996): 147–71; Stephen Houston and David Stuart, “Of Gods, Glyphs and Kings: Divinity and Rulership among the Classic Maya,” *Antiquity* 70 (1996): 289–312; and Stephen Houston, David Stuart, and Karl A. Taube, *The Memory of Bones: Body, Being, and Experience among the Classic Maya* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 57–81, 97–101.

9. This analysis is especially appropriate to the figure of the king or other royal actor on the lintels, as at Structure 23; it is less easy to apply to the images of captives or of crowds of nobles occasionally represented on lintels. Captives are never represented alone on lintels: they are always pictured being dominated by a ruler or lord, so that one typically meets the king’s eyes while entering the building and the captive’s while exiting, with the captives’ eyes often downcast. On stairs, by contrast, captives are often represented alone, and the performative tread on the body of the carved captive is part of the power of the sculptural installation.

10. William F. Hanks, *Referential Practice: Language and Lived Space among the Maya* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 91–95; Stephen D. Houston and Karl A. Taube, “An Archaeology of the Senses: Perception and Cultural Expression in Ancient Mesoamerica,” *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 10, no. 2 (2000): 287–89; Adam Herring, *Art and Writing in the Maya Cities, A.D. 600–800: A Poetics of Line* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 50–51, 54–61; and Megan O’Neil, *Engaging Ancient Maya Sculpture* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 78–79.

11. Houston et al., *Memory of Bones*, 173.

12. Erik Velásquez García, “La máscara de ‘rayos X’: Historia de un artilugio iconográfico en el arte maya,” *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, no. 90 (1997): 7–36. The god on the mask has spiral eyes, indicating a particular kind of divine perception.
13. Indeed, this seems likely to have been the case on the very eroded front side of Stela 11 (Tate, *Yaxchilán*, 237); ancestors also overlook the scenes on Stelae 1, 4, 6, 8, and 10, among others.
14. The terms are from Houston and Taube, “An Archaeology of the Senses,” 281; and Hanks, *Referential Practice*, 89.
15. Houston and Taube, “An Archaeology of the Senses,” 281–89; Byron Hamann, “‘In the Eyes of the Mixtecs/ To View Several Pages Simultaneously’: Seeing and the Mixtec Screenfolds,” *Visible Language* 38, no. 1 (2004): 79–95; and Annabeth Headrick, “Seeing through Sahagún: Observations on a Mesoamerican Staff of Office,” *Mesoamerican Voices* 1 (2003): 23–40.
16. Robert S. Nelson, “Descartes’s Cow and Other Domestications of the Visual,” in *Visuality before and beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw*, ed. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1–7.
17. Specifically, square, reflective eyes are associated with solar deities and spiral eyes with nocturnal and watery gods, hinting at different capacities of perception and understanding, surpassing all human ability; see Houston and Taube, “An Archaeology of the Senses,” 283–84.
18. Allen J. Christenson, *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Maya* (Winchester, UK: O Books, 2003), 197.
19. *Ibid.*, 200–201.
20. Evon Vogt, *Tortillas for the Gods: A Symbolic Analysis of Zinacanteco Rituals* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 205; and Hanks, *Referential Practice*, 88–90. Note how well these metaphors linking seeing and knowing also work in English; for a bravura demonstration, see Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 1–2.
21. For a productive invocation of the limits of human perception, see Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, trans. John Goodman (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 11–27.
22. Richard Neer, “The Invisible Acropolis: Three Modes of Unseeing,” in *Conditions of Visibility*, ed. Neer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). For the artist as a liminal figure in the Maya court, see David Stuart, “The Maya Artist: An Epigraphic and Iconographic Study” (BA honors thesis, Princeton University, 1989); Takeshi Inomata, “The Power and Ideology of Artistic Creation: Elite Craft Specialists in Classic Maya Society,” *Current Anthropology* 42, no. 3 (2001): 321–49; Miller and Martin, *Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya*, 121–36; and Stephen Houston, “Crafting Credit: Authorship among Classic Maya Painters and Sculptors,” in *Making Value, Making Meaning: Techné in the Pre-Columbian World*, ed. Cathy Lynne Costin (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2016), 391–431.
23. An inscription on the underside of Lintel 26 mentions the year 724, yet I will argue that the scene also represents Shield Jaguar’s accession in 681 (see below). The traditional left-to-right sequence is presented in Schele and Miller, *Blood of Kings*, 177–78, 186–88; Miller and Martin, *Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya*, 99–101, 106–9; and Mary Miller and Claudia Brittenham, *The Spectacle of the Late Maya Court: Reflections on the Murals of Bonampak* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), 65–67, among other sources (see n. 1 above). As several of these authors note, there is nothing especially unusual about a productive dissonance between image and text. Maya pictorial programs often operate quite independently from the texts that accompany them, creating “resonance” among different possible temporal and narrative sequences; for further discussion, see Mary Miller and Stephen D. Houston, “The Classic Maya Ballgame and Its Architectural Setting,” *Res* 14 (1987): 46–65.
24. Neer, “The Invisible Acropolis”; and also Clemente Marconi, “The Parthenon Frieze: Degrees of Visibility,” *Res* 55–56 (2009): 156–73. While the possibility is tempting, difficulties both logistical and conceptual present themselves. We know these monuments as flat figural rectangles, but that is largely because of the way that Lintels 24 and 25 were cut down for transport when they were removed from the site. Originally, large uncarved flanges protruded from the upper and lower edges of the carvings, allowing them to serve as structural supports. Furthermore, texts on Lintels 24, 25, and 26 record their *’abayi* (dedication or raising) on different dates, suggesting that the lintels may not all have been completed at the same time (see below).
25. In suggesting that Structure 23 is the first lintel program built after a long hiatus, preceding that of Structure 44, which was also dedicated during Shield Jaguar’s reign, I follow Martin and Grube’s proposal that the entire Structure 44 program is a single unit, dedicated in 732 CE (Martin and Grube, *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens*, 124–26), rather than viewing it as a piecemeal construction spanning the previous two decades (as proposed by Tate, *Yaxchilán*, 118–19, 258). Whatever the chronology, Structure 44 also features an unusually self-conscious and performative sculptural program, but here the interaction is between carved lintels and the carved stairs in front of the building; see Mary Miller, “A Design for Meaning in Maya Architecture,” in Houston, *Function and Meaning in Classic Maya Architecture*, 201–8; and Miller and Brittenham, *Spectacle of the Late Maya Court*, 95–96. Other possibly early figural lintels at Yaxchilán include the very damaged Lintel 36 from Structure 12 and Lintel 4 from Structure 34; see Tate, *Yaxchilán*, 168–70, 227.
26. The maximum relief on Lintel 25 is only 1¼ inches (3.2 centimeters) deep, likely indicating the presence of a different artist’s hand (see Graham and von Euw, *Yaxchilán*, 56; and Tate, *Yaxchilán*, 46), but it still shares the labor-intensive preference for clarity that distinguishes the Structure 23 lintels. By contrast, the textual Lintel 23 is in a much lower relief, more typical of Yaxchilán, only ¾ inch (0.9 centimeter) deep. The text on the outer edge of Lintel 25 is almost ¾ inch (1.8 cm) deep, deeper than the normal relief at Yaxchilán but lower than the relief on the undersides of the figural lintels. See Graham and von Euw, *Yaxchilán*, 52, 54, 56, 58; and Tate, *Yaxchilán*, 204. The structure of the relief continues the outward curve of the lintels: the relief is lower at the outer edges of the lintel, rising to its greatest height at the center, so that each figure emerges at a wedge-shaped diagonal from the surface of the stone.
27. Graham and von Euw, *Yaxchilán*, 54, 56, 58.
28. On the outer edge of Lintel 25, the lower portion of the textual lintel curves inward, facilitating reading of the upper row of glyphs. The glyphic cartouches on Lintel 26 are also fashioned for increased legibility from below.
29. James A. Doyle, “Sacrifice, Fealty, and a Sculptor’s Signature on a Maya Relief,” <http://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/2015/sculptors-signature>; and idem, “Relief with Enthroned Ruler,” <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/313240>. For La Pasadita, see Charles Golden, “La Pasadita Archaeological Project,” report submitted to FAMSI, <http://www.famsi.org/reports/97042/index.html>; and idem, “The Politics of Warfare in the Usumacinta Basin: La Pasadita and the Realm of Bird Jaguar,” in *Ancient Mesoamerican Warfare*, ed. M. Kathryn Brown and Travis Stanton (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003); and Charles Golden and Andrew Scherer, “Border Problems: Recent Archaeological Research along the Usumacinta River,” *PARI Journal* 7, no. 2 (2006): 1–16.
30. The mottled purplish pigment might alternatively suggest that the entire huipil was painted red in one iteration and blue in another. Such repaintings, often with dramatic shifts in color, were common on Maya sculpture; see Linda Schele, “Color on Classic Architecture and Monumental Sculpture of the Southern Maya Lowlands,” in *Painted Architecture and Polychrome Monumental Sculpture in Mesoamerica: A Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks, 10th to 11th October 1981*, ed. Elizabeth H. Boone (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1985), 35–36, 40–42.
31. Tate, *Yaxchilán*, 240–48.
32. The text describes the scene first as “his penance with the fiery spear [u *’baah ti ch’ajbil ti k’ahk’al jul*];” a subsidiary caption on the left edge of the lintel more closely approximates what we appear to see: “it is her image in penance, Lady Ak’in? Xook. . . [u *baah ti ch’ajbil ix ak’in? xook ix k’abal xook ix kaloomte*].”
33. Recall that the outer edge of the lintel has been lost.
34. I am grateful to Andrew Hamilton for this observation (personal communication, 2014).
35. For centipedes in ancient Maya art, see Karl A. Taube, “Maws of Heaven and Hell: The Symbolism of the Centipede and Serpent in Classic Maya Religion,” in *Antropología de la eternidad: La muerte en la cultura maya*, ed. Andres Cuidad Ruiz, Mario Humberto Ruz Sosa, and María Josefa Iglesias Ponce de Leon (Madrid: Sociedad Española de Estudios Mayas, 2003), 405–42. This supernatural creature has qualities of both serpent and centipede: the crosshatched body markings are those of a serpent, while the bony double teeth are characteristic of the centipede. Both centipedes and serpents are understood as conduits between realms. The idea of bicephalic snaky creatures, so fundamental to Maya art and cosmology, may have been inspired by certain kinds of centipedes, like the *Scolopendra polymorpha*, in which both head and tail are a contrasting color and appear to have jaws and pincers.

36. This is not the only doubling in the scene. Not one but two vessels hold the residues of autosacrifice, in its male and female iterations: the vessel in Lady Xook's hand contains blood-spotted paper and a stingray spine, the preferred implement for men when they perforated their penises, while the rope with thorns spilling out of the dish on the ground gestures toward women's bloodletting, of the kind pictured on Lintel 24. The vision itself is also doubled. From the serpent's upper maw emerges the torso of a warrior, who holds a shield in his left hand and angles a spear at Lady Xook with his right. The inscription describing this apparition, *u kawiiilil u took' u pakal aj kabk' o' chahk*, is an enigmatic phrase that suggests something like the "lightning-power of the flints and shields of the god Aj K'ahk' O' Chahk," a patron deity of Yaxchilan, though "u took' u pakal" (his flints and shields) may also be a more generalized expression for warfare. We see both face and mask of this warlike apparition simultaneously: the goggle eyes and agnathic jaw of the Tlaloc, the Teotihuacan god of rain and war, float in front of the human face, this "x-ray mask" convention another way of revealing a truth that cannot be seen by the eye; see Velásquez García, "La máscara de 'rayos X,'" 7–36. Out of the rear head of the bicephalic serpent emerges a similar agnathic goggle mask and balloon headdress, without any human body inhabiting it: this is either the head of the god Tlaloc or the mask and headdress that would transform its wearer into the god, allowing him to become like the warrior-ancestor above. Much about this scene refers to contact with the past, with the powerful city of Teotihuacan at its apogee in the fifth century CE.

37. Mallory Matsumoto, "Reflection as Transformation: Mirror-Image Structure on Maya Monumental Texts as a Visual Metaphor for Ritual Participation," *Estudios de Cultura Maya* 41 (2013): 102–3.

38. *Ibid.*, 116–19; and Joel Palka, "Left/Right Symbolism and the Body in Ancient Maya Iconography and Culture," *Latin American Antiquity* 13, no. 4 (2002): 430–33.

39. This same position of royal women above the fray and sheltered from sight—while simultaneously encompassing the rest of the action within their visual field—also occurs in Rooms 1 and 3 of Bonampak, where the throne is painted on the upper vault of a shadowed inner wall. See Miller and Brittenham, *Spectacle of the Late Maya Court*, 33, 125, 134, 142.

40. García Moll, *La arquitectura de Yaxchilan*, 180; Maler, *Researches in the Central Portion of the Usumatsintla Valley*, 151; and Tate, *Yaxchilan*, 203. Two tombs cut into the floors of the central and northern rooms of the dwelling are thought to contain the burials of Shield Jaguar (d. 742) and his consort Lady Xook (d. 749), but they may not have been planned at the building's inception, more than fifteen years before Shield Jaguar's death. See García Moll, "Shield Jaguar and Structure 23 at Yaxchilan," 269–70; and Martin and Grube, *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens*, 126.

41. Maler reconstructs a roof comb and illustrates a cross-hatched stucco pattern found underneath the cornice; see Maler, *Researches in the Central Portion of the Usumatsintla Valley*, 151; and García Moll, *La arquitectura de Yaxchilan*, 180. Altar 7, located downslope some distance in front of the central door, likely commemorated 9.14.15.0.0, or September 14, 726 CE; for the date, see Morley, *The Inscriptions of Petén*, 483, 493–94.

42. The captors are Yajaw Chan Muwaan, the king of Bonampak, taking a captive on January 9, 787; Shield Jaguar IV, the king of Yaxchilan, acting on January 5, 787; and Aj Sak Teles, the father of Yajaw Chan Muwaan, shown on July 13, 748. Miller and Brittenham, *Spectacle of the Late Maya Court*, 27–33, 64–68. Like the left-to-right reading of the Structure 23 lintel figural undersides, these three scenes offer a rewarding sequence, even though they could not have been seen in this way once installed.

43. Other Yaxchilan lintels elect one or the other surface for decoration: seven lintels at Yaxchilan are decorated on the edge only; forty-eight feature carvings on the undersides alone. Lintels carved on both edge and underside are also found at Chichen Itza and sites in the northern lowlands.

44. Whether the Structure 23 program was intended to have these properties from the outset remains an open question. As I will discuss below, interpreting the dates carved on the lintels—and the sequence in which the lintels were carved—poses significant challenges (see n. 74 below; I am grateful to Stephen Houston and Mark Van Stone for considering these aspects of the program with me). I describe here the overall program at the dedication of the structure in 726, and I consider it likely that in spite of the different hands and moments of dedication, the unusual properties of the program are too cohesive to be the result of mere chance and reflect deliberate planning.

45. For the reconstruction of this date, see Tate, *Yaxchilan*, 208; for the *och kabk'* decipherment, see David Stuart, "'The Fire Enters His House': Architecture and Ritual in Classic Maya Texts," in Houston, *Function and Meaning in Classic Maya Architecture*, 384–89.

46. *Ibid.*, 379.

47. Few alternatives are permitted if one aims to follow the sculptural program's dictates. One cannot pass under Lintel 25, above the central doorway, because that edge text begins with a Distance Number counting from the underside of the lintel. It is unclear if one could go under Lintel 24, because its outer edge is destroyed, but it seems equally unlikely. The text on the edge of Lintel 23 begins with a Calendar Round date, the beginning of a new phrase, so one could "short-circuit" the professional itinerary by moving counterclockwise from the outside of Lintel 26 to the outside of Lintel 23, and then enter the building under this doorway. The abbreviated program would still have a chiasmic structure, beginning and ending with the *och kabk'* ceremony.

48. The seating, or opening day, of the month of Pop begins the *haab*, or solar year, in the Maya calendar, as Tate (*Yaxchilan*, 205) reminds us, so the date chosen for this dedication may have some significance. This has often been interpreted as the date of the principal scene on the lintel, for example, in Martin and Grube, *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens*, 125–26; Miller and Martin, *Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya*, 106 (but see also 108); and Schele and Freidel, *A Forest of Kings*, 268, which then creates a problem: Why do the scenes on the undersides seesaw between 709, 681, and 724?

49. The text reads: "on 12 Eb o Pop it was raised, the carving of K'awiil Chahk, he from [the still-unidentified site of] Sak Ook [*12 Eb chum Pohp t'abayi yuxul? kawiiil*

chahk aj sak ook]." For sculptors' signatures, see Houston, "Crafting Credit."

50. The text reads: "it is his image in accession ?? ?? Huk Chapaht Tzikiin K'inich Ajaw [a deity name], the 4 k'atun lord, the captor of Aj Hol, Shield Jaguar, Holy Yaxchilan Lord [*u baah ti joyeel ti xikibalel(?)? huk chapahb tzikiin k'inich ajaw 4 k'atun ajaw u chan aj hol itzamnaah bablam kuhul pa' chan ajaw*]." Note that although the text likely describes Shield Jaguar's accession, it already gives him titles that he accumulated long after he took office. The event may have taken place while Shield Jaguar impersonated the god Huk Chapaht Tzikiin K'inich Ajaw, a solar centipede deity, although the passage reads **ti-xi-ki-ba-le**, *ti-xikbal-el*, and not *ubaahil aan*, a more conventional impersonation expression (my thanks to Stephen Houston for pointing out the potential impersonation statement, personal communication, 2014). For Huk Chapaht Tzikiin K'inich Ajaw, see Alexandre Tokovinine, catalogue entry for "Painted Vessel," in *Ancient Maya Art at Dumbarton Oaks*, ed. Joanne Pillsbury et al. (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2012), 344–53; Andrea Stone and Marc Uwe Zender, *Reading Maya Art: A Hieroglyphic Guide to Ancient Maya Painting and Sculpture* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011), 178–79; and Taube, "Maws of Heaven and Hell," 406–18. "Yaxchilan: Lintel 26," the Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions, <https://www.peabody.harvard.edu/cmhi/detail.php?num=26&site=Yaxchilan&-type=Lintel>, notes the relation to Shield Jaguar's accession and the secondary nature of the dedication date. The lintel originally may have contained another incised text, now almost completely eroded, between the legs of the two principal figures; see Maler, *Researches in the Central Portion of the Usumatsintla Valley*, 153. If so, this text likely identified the female figure, presumably naming her as Lady Xook.

51. The diadem features the head of a deity with a prominent upper lip; other inscriptions record that this headdress is called the *huun*, *huunal*, or *sak huun* (literally, "white paper") headdress, though jade exemplars have been recovered at several Maya sites, including El Perú-Waka', Aguateca, and Topoxte. For the jades, see David F. Lee and Jennifer C. Piehl, "Ritual and Remembrance at the Northwest Palace Complex, El Perú-Waka'," in *Archaeology at El Perú-Waka': Ancient Maya Performances of Ritual, Memory, and Power*, ed. Olivia C. Navarro-Farr and Michelle Rich (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014), 87–90; for the mythical referents of the headdress, see David Stuart, "The Name of Paper: The Mythology of Crowning and Royal Nomenclature on Palenque's Palace Tablet," in *Maya Archaeology* 2, ed. Charles Golden, Stephen Houston, and Joel Skidmore (San Francisco: Precolumbia Mesoweb Press, 2012), 117–48.

52. For a list of other mirror-image inscriptions, see Matsumoto, "Reflection as Transformation," 95. We call these "mirror images," but how Maya artists produced them remains mysterious, since the images visible in Maya pyrite or hematite mirrors might not have allowed this level of precision; for examples of Maya mosaic mirrors, see Miller and Martin, *Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya*, 44–45. That the text of Lintel 25 is reversed has invited several theories. Houston ("Classic Maya Depictions of the Built Environment," 342) suggests that it allows the reader to face "into" the text while entering

the building, as is traditional with Maya inscriptions, such that “the reader approaches [the glyphs] as a suppliant might a higher-ranking individual.” Palka (“Left/Right Symbolism,” 430), by contrast, argues that not just the text but the entire scene is reversed, addressing the tension of whether Lady Xook or the high-status male figure emerging from the vision serpent ought to occupy the privileged right side. Unfortunately, there is no surviving evidence that lets us say with certainty which direction Lintel 25 faced when it was installed in the doorway. Maudslay (*Biología Centrali-Americana*, 5:45) encountered it already fallen and sawed off the edge text without first recording which edge it bordered. His assistants thinned both edge and underside blocks, and in its present form, the block with the edge glyphs is longer than either long edge of the underside, so the pieces can no longer be reconnected (data from British Museum collections website, underside: https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3086881&partId=1&searchText=yaxchilan&page=1.am1923,maud.5; edge: https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3428768&partId=1&searchText=yaxchilan&page=1.Am1923,Maud.14). By analogy with Lintel 26, where the text borders the right side of the underside scene, and presumably also with Lintel 24, if the jagged cuts on the right edge mark where Rockstroh cut off the now-destroyed edge text, it is likely that the text was on the outer right edge of Lintel 25. The surface of the underside of Lintel 25 swells toward the left, offering further support for this position (see above). If this is so, then the heads of the figures on all three lintel undersides likely faced in the same direction, as is the case with other lintel programs remaining in situ (such as Yaxchilan Structure 33 and Bonampak Structure 1). If the heads were oriented to the left or southeast, as seems likely, it is true that someone passing under Lintel 25 from the outside of the building would “read into” the reversed glyphs. But this seems insufficient to explain the mirror-image text. When one approaches Lintel 26, with its conventionally oriented texts, from the outside of the building (as the Initial Series on the outer edge suggests one must), the texts face away from the reader, and reading the text from left to right moves from the inside to the outside of the building. This is also the case on the lintels of Bonampak Structure 1 (but not, for example, on Yaxchilan Structure 33). While the Maya would typically “read into” texts on a horizontal surface, and often placed lintels so that this was possible, other compositional priorities could trump this impulse, and it alone is not sufficient to explain the presence and absence of mirror texts on Lintel 25. The choice of mirror writing likely responded to multiple imperatives at once, highlighting both the uncanny nature of the scene on the lintel and something unusual about the movement through the doorway.

53. The text reads: “Then 0 days, 7 winals, 2 tuns, and 2 k’atuns passed and K’awil was conjured in front of the waters at Yaxchilan [u tz’akaj o k’in 7 winals 2 haab 2 k’atuns [2.2.7.0] tzakjiy k’awil tabn ba’ pa’cban].”

54. While this ritual remains obscure, it was important enough to warrant mention on several retrospective monuments by Shield Jaguar’s successor: Lintel 53 in Structure

55 and Lintel 32 in Structure 13. In both cases, under Bird Jaguar’s patronage, his mother, Lady Ik’ Skull, is said to have let blood on the following day, 6 Ben 16 Mac (though the date is recorded as 7 Ben 16 Mac on Lintel 32; see Tatiana Proskouriakoff, “Historical Data in the Inscriptions of Yaxchilan,” pt. 1, *Estudios de Cultura Maya* 3 [1963]: 164; and Tate, *Yaxchilán*, 172, 262, 272). Saturn and Jupiter were in a stationary alignment at this time (Tate, *Yaxchilán*, 272). It might also be significant that both the event on Lintel 24 and Shield Jaguar’s accession fell on a *tzolk’in* day (a day in the 260-day calendar) with a coefficient of 5 within the month of Mak (a month in the 365-day calendar), although it’s not clear how much weight the Maya put on this kind of calendrical correspondence.

55. The presence of an undecorated lintel within this complex program might seem strange, but in fact it allows for the entire building to be circumambulated without passing the “wrong way” underneath any lintel: one might exit from underneath the undecorated lintel both now and after concluding the final circuit through the building. For the undecorated lintel, see García Moll, *La arquitectura de Yaxchilán*, 177.

56. Plank, *Maya Dwellings*, 46–48. For the decipherment of *pasil*, or “doorway,” see Stuart, “The Fire Enters His House,” 379. See n. 78 below for further discussion of this passage.

57. Stephen Houston, personal communication, 2015; see also McNany and Plank, “Perspectives on Actors, Gender Roles,” 111–13; and Plank, *Maya Dwellings*, 46–48. For a genealogical interpretation of this passage, see J. Kathryn Josserand, “The Missing Heir at Yaxchilan: Literary Analysis of a Maya Historical Puzzle,” *Latin American Antiquity* 18, no. 3 (2007): 295–313.

58. More precisely, his 2 *k’atuns* and 5 *tuns* in rulership, a *tun* consisting of 360 days, and a *k’atun* of 20 *tuns*. Unlike the situation on Lintel 26, where the beginning of the text on the edge and the texts on the underside share the same alignment (in both cases, the tops of the text point to the left, or southeast), the text on the underside of Lintel 23 begins on the right, reversing the orientation from the edge. Yet this, too, has a spatial logic: the reader reads the edge text left to right, then picks up on the outer right corner of the underside text, rather than retracing her steps to begin again on the left. This also means that the viewer “reads into” the text on the underside of the lintel in the approved manner as she moves into the building; see Houston, “Classic Maya Depictions of the Built Environment,” 342.

59. Plank (*Maya Dwellings*, 163, 216) has noted a similar pattern in the later lintels of Chichen Itza, where lintel edge texts provide an “executive summary” of the lintel dedication, focusing on the genealogy of the donor and the positive omens of the dedication, often divined under the auspices of K’ak’upakal, the city’s ruler, while more detailed information about deities and ritual is confined to the more sheltered and inaccessible underside texts. A similar separation of public and private messages may be seen in the murals of Bonampak: both inside and outside address the same themes of rulership and warfare, but the stories inside are much more complex, featuring a far larger group of actors; see Miller and Brittenham, *Spectacle of the Late Maya Court*, 27–31.

60. Stuart, “The Fire Enters His House,” 374–75; see further discussion below.

61. Christenson, *Popol Vuh*, 46–47; idem, “The Use of Chiasmus by the Ancient K’iche’ Maya,” in *Parallel Worlds: Genre, Discourse, and Poetics in Contemporary, Colonial, and Classic Maya Literature*, ed. Kerry Hull and Michael Carrasco (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2012), 311–38; and Kerry Hull, “Verbal Art and Performance in Ch’orti’ and Maya Hieroglyphic Writing” (PhD diss., University of Texas, 2003), 175–78, 297–301, 456, 478–81.

62. Allen Christenson, “Popol Vuh Literal Translation,” 10, lines 253–62, accessed January 2, 2017, <http://www.mesoweb.com/publications/Christenson/PV-Literal.pdf>.

63. For chiasmus in Maya hieroglyphic texts, see Hull, “Verbal Art and Performance in Ch’orti’ and Maya Hieroglyphic Writing,” 456, 478–81.

64. For chiasmus at Bonampak, see Miller and Brittenham, *Spectacle of the Late Maya Court*, 68.

65. For chiasmus at Yaxchilan Structure 22, see Megan O’Neil, “Object, Materiality, and Memory at Yaxchilán: The Reset Lintels of Structures 12 and 22,” *Ancient Mesoamerica* 22 (2011): 253–54. It is also a feature of Structures 1, 13, 16, and 42; see Tate, *Yaxchilán*, 150–51, 171–73, 177–78, 250–51.

66. O’Neil, *Engaging Ancient Maya Sculpture*, 63–104, 183–87.

67. Gary Gossen, “Temporal and Spatial Equivalents in Chamula Ritual Symbolism,” in *A Reader in Comparative Religion*, ed. Evon Vogt and William Lessa (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1972), 145; McNany and Plank, “Perspectives on Actors, Gender Roles,” 117; and Plank, *Maya Dwellings*, 52. As Joel Palka reminded me (personal communication, 2016), the counterclockwise direction of men’s ritual may be associated with the movement of the sun through the sky, so it is especially appropriate to see the reverse in this building associated with the moon goddess.

68. O’Neil, “Object, Materiality, and Memory at Yaxchilán,” 257; and idem, *Engaging Ancient Maya Sculpture*, 95–102.

69. Maler, *Researches in the Central Portion of the Usumatsinla Valley*, 151; and Morley, *The Inscriptions of Petén*, 2:483, 493–94.

70. David Stuart, “A Study of Maya Inscriptions” (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1995), 99–100.

71. Lintel 10 in Structure 3 records an *och k’abk’* event, as does Lintel 56 of Structure 11, while Lintel 28 of Structure 24 records a fire-entering ceremony into Lady Xook’s tomb. Another kind of dedication rite, an *el naab* (perhaps house censuring), is recorded on Lintel 21 in Structure 22; Stuart, “The Fire Enters His House,” 389–92.

72. Plank, *Maya Dwellings*, 75–79, 167–81, 214.

73. Alfred M. Tozzer, *Landa’s Relación de las Cosas de Yucatan: A Translation*, Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University 18 (Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum, 1941), 161, cited in Stuart, “The Fire Enters His House,” 374, 389.

74. The repetition of the action of *t'abayi* is perplexing (refer to Appendix). Could Lintel 26 have been raised in dedication twice, once as part of the overall consecration of the building in August 723 (as recorded on the edge of Lintel 25), and then again six months later as the work of its carver (as recorded on the underside of Lintel 26)? Might the first dedication statement in August 723 refer to something like the planning of the program rather than its final execution? Or is this a metaphoric statement rather than a commemoration of a physical reality? There is much we still do not understand about dedication statements.

This is not the only puzzle about the dedication dates on Structure 23. Mark Van Stone has demonstrated that teams of sculptors could have completed most Maya carved works within weeks or months; Van Stone, “*Aj-Ts'ib, Aj-Uxul, Itz'aat, & Aj-K'uh'u'n*: Classic Maya Schools of Carvers and Calligraphers in Palenque after the Reign of Kan-Bahlam” (PhD diss., University of Texas, 2005), 100, 212, 350, 367–68, 370. There is nothing especially demanding about the construction of Structure 23 that would have required three years to complete. Why were the dedication events of Structure 23 spread out over such a long time? Were the lintels carved near the beginning or the end of that period?

Appreciate the difficulties: on Lintel 26, the underside specifies a *t'abayi* event in February 724, but the outer edge of the lintel commemorates the *och kabk'* of 726. The two are carved by different hands (Tate, *Yaxchilan*, 42–46), and because the edge could be carved once the lintel was in place, it is not impossible that there may be some difference in time between them. The problem is more severe on Lintel 23, where the edge text specifies the raising of the doorway in March 724, but the underside of the lintel describes the fire-entering dedication of the entire building in June 726. The underside of the lintel is unlikely to have been carved once the lintel was in place (Mark Van Stone, personal communication, 2015; see also Plank, “Monumental Maya Dwellings,” 439). One possibility is that the lintels were carved and raised in 724, at which time the dedication ceremony for the building had already been projected for a date two years in the future. There were certainly reasons why the 726 date was auspicious—it occurs near the summer solstice (a time of great ritual interest at Yaxchilan; see Tate, *Yaxchilan*, 94–96), right after the 45-tun anniversary of Shield Jaguar's accession, and just months before the period ending 9.14.15.0.0, or September 14, 726, which might also have been celebrated at Structure 23. But Shield Jaguar was already quite elderly by 724, so there might have been some risk in delaying the celebration for two years—and it seems strange to imagine the building standing nearly completed (it would be advisable to put the roof on once the lintels were in place) for two years before its ritual activation. The alternative, though, is equally unsatisfying: that the carving all happened in 726, close to the final dedication of the building, and the texts refer back retrospectively to more ephemeral dedication events that happened in 723 and 724—and not to the actual physical carving of the lintels. We simply don't yet understand the relation between the dates on Maya carving and the actual execution of the carving itself. See also Claudia Brittenham, “Ritual in Stone: Dedicatory Texts and Images on Maya Sculpture” (paper presented at the conference “Image et écriture dans les religions anciennes: Dispositifs, interactions, concurrence,”

Atelier Chicago-Paris sur les religions anciennes, Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, Paris, 2016).

75. The verb commonly occurs in mediopassive form, with no actor specified. See Stephen Houston, *The Gifted Passage: Young Men in Classic Maya Art and Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 64; and David Stuart, “Glyphs on Pots: Decoding Classic Maya Ceramics,” in *Workbook for the 29th Maya Meetings, the University of Texas at Austin*, 2005, Maya Decipherment blog, secs. 3, 15, accessed October 2013, <https://decipherment.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/stuartceramictexts.pdf>. One form of the glyph shows the head of the aged God N, who is sometimes pictured lifting or supporting a burden; another allograph shows a flight of stairs with a footprint ascending. This is the same “God N” verb that begins the “Primary Standard Sequence” or “Dedicatory Formula” on painted pottery; see Stuart, “Glyphs on Pots,” secs. 3c, 15. It is notable that *t'abayi* does not apply to the erection of stelae, for which the verb is either *k'al* (see below) or *tz'ap* (perhaps “to plant”). In surviving inscriptions, this act is consistently associated with the work of craft: it occurs most frequently on painted ceramic vessels but is also found on jades, shells, and other portable objects, and occasionally on carved lintels. It would be interesting to know if unworked objects could be *t'abayi*, but evidence is necessarily elusive.

76. This is the earliest act of dedication in the entire program, taking place on August 2, 723. The phrase is *t'abayi yuxul'il yotoot* [upturned pot title] *k'uh ix ak'in xook ix k'abal xook* (it is raised, the carving of the dwelling of [undeciphered title] god/holy Lady Ak'in Xook, Lady K'abal Xook). Specifying the *yuxul'il* and not simply the *yuxul'* (decipherment still remains contested) of the carving distinguishes this inscription from the two others; that *-il* suffix indicates something like intimate possession, highlighting the relation between the carvings and the dwelling; Stephen Houston, John Robertson, and David Stuart, “Quality and Quantity in Glyphic Nouns and Adjectives,” *Research Reports on Ancient Maya Writing* 47 (2001): 7–14. For the doubts about the *yuxul* reading, see Houston, “Crafting Credit,” 393, 424–25nn8–9.

77. Each names the carving as the work of a specific individual: K'awiil Chahk, from the site of Sak Ook, on the underside of Lintel 26, and Mo' Chahk, with a still-undeciphered title, on the underside of Lintel 24. The *t'abayi* event on the underside of Lintel 26 is dated February 9, 724; the corresponding event on the underside of Lintel 24 is not dated. Both sculptors bear in their names the element Chahk, the Maya god of rain and lightning, who is often shown brandishing an ax and whose work is frequently analogized to that of the sculptor; Houston, “Crafting Credit,” 401–2. These three inscriptions have a clear hierarchy of visibility and importance: the large public text on the outer edge of Lintel 25 is given far more weight than the inconspicuous sculptors' signatures on the undersides of the lintels. And even the sculptors are ranked: K'awiil Chahk's signature, carved in low relief behind the head of one of the figures and specifying the date of dedication, claims greater prominence than Mo' Chahk's incised text lurking behind Shield Jaguar's leg. The inclusion of *t'abayi* in these inscriptions is unusual; typically, a sculptor's signature simply reads *yuxul'* (“it is his carving”) plus the name of the sculptor. For sculptors' signatures, see Stuart, “The Maya Artist”; and Houston, “Crafting Credit.”

Tate (*Yaxchilan*, 42–46) ascribes the undersides of both Lintels 24 and 26 to the same sculptor. However, we know that Maya sculptors frequently collaborated on even minor projects; see Van Stone, “*Aj-Ts'ib, Aj-Uxul*,” 100–101 and *passim*. Thus, it seems quite possible that more than one carver was involved in the creation of these lintels. Still, the possibility also remains that these texts name the patron or sponsor of the carving rather than its actual executor, especially in the cases where the title is particularly exalted; see for example Simon Martin, Stephen Houston, and Marc Zender, “Sculptors and Subjects: Notes on the Incised Text of Calakmul Stela 51,” accessed July 2015, <https://decipherment.wordpress.com/2015/01/07/sculptors-and-subjects-notes-on-the-incised-text-of-calakmul-stela-51/>.

78. Plank, *Maya Dwellings*, 46–48. For the decipherment of *pasil*, or “doorway,” see Stuart, “The Fire Enters His House,” 379. Stuart (“Kings of Stone,” 154–58) initially proposed that the verb *k'al* referred to an act of binding, particularly appropriate to its occurrence on stelae, which seem to have been wrapped in cloth at the moment of their dedication. Yet mounting evidence suggests that the verb refers to a more generalized act of dedication, or perhaps another kind of raising or elevation; see Houston, *The Gifted Passage*, 192n15. At Structure 23, the positional suffix *-wan* suggests such a change in location, perhaps the physical erection of the doorway; the carving is not explicitly mentioned, as it was in the earlier *t'abayi* inscriptions. As Plank (*Maya Dwellings*, 47) puts it: “The lintel over the side door of Yaxchilan Structure 23 both *records* the rite and *embodies* it as an architectural framing element that is part of the creation of the door.” Possibly there is some parallel with the *hol chuk*, or “binding of the head of the roof” rite, practiced in modern Zinacantan, described in Evon Vogt, “Zinacanteco Dedication and Termination Rituals,” in *The Sowing and the Dawning: Termination, Dedication, and Transformation in the Archaeological and Ethnographic Record of Mesoamerica*, ed. Shirley Boteler Mock (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 21–22.

79. See n. 57 above.

80. This is the most likely reconstruction of the date on the outer edge of Lintel 26, even though the moon ages do not match (see Tate, *Yaxchilan*, 208). Stephen Houston suggests that something like a *ba-? il*, or “first seeing,” is also recorded on the outer edge of Lintel 26 (personal communication, 2015).

81. Stuart, “The Fire Enters His House,” 393–96; Evon Vogt, *Zinacantan: A Maya Community in the Highlands of Chiapas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 461–65; and *idem*, “Zinacanteco Dedication and Termination Rituals,” 21–27.

82. Stuart, “The Fire Enters His House,” 395–96. Among the ancient Maya, *och kabk'* ceremonies were not restricted to the dedication of new buildings, however: inscriptions also record fire-entering events at tombs, in what seem to be periodic rituals of renewal or ancestor veneration; *ibid.*, 396–99.

83. For oral performance of Maya monumental texts, see Stephen Houston, “Literacy among the Pre-Columbian Maya: A Comparative Perspective,” in *Writing without*

Words: *Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica and the Andes*, ed. Elizabeth Hill Boone and Walter D. Mignolo (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 30–31.

84. The ownership phrase on Lintel 26 is almost completely destroyed, but the one glyph that remains also seems to have supernatural connotations.

85. Plank, *Maya Dwellings*, 44–46. For deity impersonation, see Houston et al., *Memory of Bones*, 59–81.

86. Stuart, “The Fire Enters His House,” 374.

87. Stuart, “Kings of Stone”; see also Brittenham, “Ritual in Stone.”

88. Stuart, “Kings of Stone,” 158; and David Stuart, “Shining Stones: Observations on the Ritual Meaning of Early Maya Stelae,” in *The Place of Stone Monuments: Context, Use, and Meaning in Mesoamerica’s Preclassic Transition*, ed. Julia Guernsey, John E. Clark, and Barbara Arroyo (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 283–85.

89. Miller and Brittenham, *Spectacle of the Late Maya Court*, 74–75; Houston and Taube, catalogue entry “Carved Panel,” in Pillsbury et al., *Ancient Maya Art at Dumbarton Oaks*, 38–47; and Miller and Martin, *Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya*, 218.

90. While Lintels 15 and 16 bow out nearly imperceptibly toward the viewer, the surface of Lintel 17 is gently concave; see Graham and von Euw, *Yaxchilan*, 39–43; and Tate, *Yaxchilán*, 197.

91. Martin and Grube, *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens*, 134–35; and Tate, *Yaxchilán*, 187–95.

92. David Stuart, “Historical Inscriptions and the Maya Collapse,” in *Lowland Maya Civilization in the Eighth Century A.D.*, ed. Jeremy A. Sabloff and John S. Henderson (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1993); Miller and Brittenham, *Spectacle of the Late Maya Court*, 77–85, 92, 153–58; and Sarah E. Jackson, *Politics of the Maya Court: Hierarchy and Change in the Late Classic Period* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013).

93. Carved relief on lintels is deepest during commissions produced during Shield Jaguar III’s reign (averaging 1 $\frac{1}{8}$ in., or 2.8 cm); the average is $\frac{5}{16}$ in. (.69 cm) during Bird Jaguar IV’s reign, $\frac{7}{16}$ in. (1.1 cm) during Shield Jaguar IV’s reign, and $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (.65 cm) on the few lintels attributed to K’inich Tatbu Skull IV’s reign. Calculations are by the author, based on data presented in Tate, *Yaxchilán*, 150–265; and Graham and von Euw, *Yaxchilan*, vol. 3, pt. 1 (1977), vol. 3, pt. 2, by Graham (1979), vol. 3, pt. 3, by Graham (1982), *Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions*, <https://www.peabody.harvard.edu/cmhi/site.php?site=Yaxchilan>.

94. Tate, *Yaxchilán*, 265.

95. Plaster was even used to fill imperfections in the stone; see Graham, *Yaxchilan*, vol. 3, pt. 2, 119; and Tate, *Yaxchilán*, 265.

96. Beat Brenk, “Visibility and (Partial) Invisibility of Early Christian Images,” in *Seeing the Invisible in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Giselle de Nie,

Karl F. Morrison, and Marco Mostert, *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy* (Utrecht: Brepols, 2003), 139–83.

97. Miller and Brittenham, *Spectacle of the Late Maya Court*, 26–33.

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