WARFARE AND REPRESENTATION IN THE CLASSIC MAYA:

BONAMPAK AND YAXCHILAN

By

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This paper examines the warfare practices of the Maya, and the role and function of kinship during the Classic Period (AD. 250-900) in the Mesoamerican lowlands. Artistic representation, specifically the Bonampak Murals, and stelae and lintels from both the Bonampak and Yaxchilan sites are used to discuss the political and ritualistic aspects of warfare, including bloodletting rituals, captive capture, and public sacrifice. The inter-political relationship between Bonampak and Yaxchilan is examined revealing the practice of intermarriage between to the two polities and joint warfare endeavors.

The complexities of cultural practices, sophistication of the culture, and artifacts and monuments of the ancient Maya civilization have captivated archaeologists and the public for decades. Surviving artistic representations have remained one of the best resources for uncovering the life of the ancient Maya. This is especially true in the case of traditional warfare practices and the role of kingship in the ancient Maya polities of the southern Mesoamerican lowlands.

In recent years, understanding and insights into the Maya civilization have increased due to the decipherment of their hieroglyphic writing system. Hieroglyphics have revealed details of religious and political, as well as social aspects of elite Maya society, and especially elements of the personal and political lives of Maya royalty (McKillop 2004:175). Often emphasizing the dynastic descent and rule of individual lords, hieroglyphic texts inscribed on stelae and many other mediums, including door lintels and wall panels, facilitate the interpretation of the historic events (Martin and Grube 2000:8-12). These monuments were utilized by Maya lords to assert their authority and commemorate events of importance, mainly those in the context of war. It was not until the breakthroughs in decipherment of hieroglyphics that it was realized these texts
were not just calendars or records of astronomy and religion, but historical records that highlighted victorious battles, names of captives and cities conquered, as well as marriages, alliances, deaths, and accessions (McKillop 2004:188; Demarest 2004: 45).

The decipherment of texts that often accompany artistic representations provides a more in-depth understanding of the images themselves. This is especially true of the murals at the Classic period site of Bonampak. First viewed by outsiders in 1946, the Bonampak murals remain the largest and most intact example of mural painting produced by the Classic Maya. In recent years, the cleaning and reconstruction of the Bonampak murals have allowed for a more precise reading of many details, including glyphs, which had previously been indistinguishable (Drew 1999:286). Having been thoroughly analyzed, the murals at Bonampak provide a great deal of information about the particularities of warfare practices in Classic Maya society that are difficult to determine otherwise.

The Maya civilization emerged in southern Mesoamerica, a region that encompasses what today is, southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador and parts of Honduras. Although this is a specific region, the term Mesoamerica, as archaeologists use it, refers more to the shared cultural and social traditions of the area than the geographical location (Schele and Mathews 1998:15). Mesoamerican history is traditionally divided into three periods –the Pre-Classic (ca. 2000 B.C. – A.D. 250), the Classic (ca. A.D. 250 – 900), and the Post-Classic (ca. A.D. 900 -1697) (Martin and Grube 2000:8; Schele and Mathews 1998:16). The culture and civilization of the Maya reached its apogee, with the highest level of social complexity and artistic output and its greatest population size, in the later part of the Classic period, or the Late Classic (A.D. 600 – 900). Never politically unified, the large populace was divided into numerous political entities. Martin and Grube (2000:7) recognize more than sixty independent kingdoms, each ruled by a divine king. These rulers claimed a god-like status through their
The inclusion of both the terms for “holy” and “lord” within their emblem glyphs, titles that were held by few and signified their position as the supreme political and religious authority (Houston and Stuart 1996:295; McKillop 2004:17). Hieroglyphic texts show that these rulers place emphasis on the importance of royal lineage, claiming direct descent from the gods, as their “spiritual manifestation on earth” (Weaver 1972:136).

For these religious leaders, ideological sanction and support was key to maintaining their political authority. At the core of Maya religion, was the belief that blood sacrifice, in various forms, was crucial for the proper functioning of the cosmos (Sheets 2003: 290). Arthur Demarest (1992:147) has pointed out that the primary role of Maya rulers and the principal source of their power is based on their religious role; the ruler of a polity is the shaman, prophet and source of sacred blood. The role of the holy lord as the supplier of sacred blood served an important ritual function. Bloodletting rituals were performed as offerings to the gods in exchange for divine sanctification and favor. The auto sacrifices of royalty were recorded on public monuments to ensure public knowledge of the ruler’s dedication and devotion (Weaver 1972: 155). The gods were also offered blood that was obtained through the sacrifice of enemy captives taken during battle.

In addition to the role as head of state and religious leader, the ruler of each polity was also the military leader, and fought alongside his army in battle (Culbert 1993:88). The focus of battles for the Maya warriors was the capture of enemies to be publicly sacrificed in the communal centers of their settlement. This practice brought prestige to the warriors, publicly reinforced the power and authority of Maya rulers and elites, and provided human blood that was vital to their ideology (McKillop 2004:178). These public rituals were central to Classic Maya politics and were often recorded on public monuments as testimonials to the rulers who orchestrated them.
In the lives of the ancient Maya, art served a fundamental political purpose. Imagery was chosen by rulers to convey specific ideals that rulers “thought required support through symbolic display” (Schele and Miller 1986:103). Subject matter of monuments was wide-ranging, but depictions of warfare were the most common, especially in art of the Late Classic (McKillop 2004:188). Warfare images predominately included the capture and sacrifice of prisoners, commemorating the militaristic achievement of rulers. The public displays of captives was probably the most frequently depicted scene, appearing at almost every Maya site and it is therefore likely that this was the most important element of warfare celebrations (Schele and Miller 1986:210).

As the basis for justification to rule, the king’s position as military leader was vital, and the visual reinforcement that was provided through artistic representation was key. Works of art in public spaces were likely visible to a large audience and the depiction of royalty as warrior figures served as a reminder for their position and achievements, therefore creating a foundation for political support.

An investigation into the various examples of warfare representations, specifically those that include images of auto- and captive sacrifices, and the accompanying hieroglyphic texts illustrates the important role of art in the politics of Maya civilization. They also demonstrate how rulers use images to help promote their successful exploits and political authority. I will use the murals and lintels at the site of Bonampak, as well as stelae from both Bonampak and Yaxchilan to discuss the ways in which Maya kings asserted authority, waged war, and maintained power in the Late Classic period.
Ritualized Warfare

The various independent political entities that made up the Maya civilization battled with one another almost constantly, and thus, warfare was a prominent aspect in the Classic period art and inscriptions. The weight of warfare in the mindset of the Maya is apparent in the way it functioned in religious, as well as social and political aspects of Maya life (Culbert 1993:84). Frequently characterized as “ritualized warfare”, the warfare practices of the Maya that were executed outside of the battlefield appear to have more importance than the actual battle itself.

The various roles of warfare in Maya society are reflected in the practices of captive capture and their ensuing sacrifices. Battles mainly consisted of hand-to-hand combat between elite males of warring polities and provided prisoners for sacrificial purposes. Dedication of human blood to the gods was the common goal. Upon capture, prisoners, as evidence of military victory, were ritualistically tortured and publicly sacrificed, providing political support and prestige for the king (Inomata and Triadan 2009). As sacrificial offerings were a necessary component of most rituals throughout the reign of a Maya king, seizure of captives was a requirement in sustaining his rule. The basis of the king’s power and prestige demanded human sacrifice and military conquest, but in turn placed the ruler and his dynasty in danger; the capture of that ruler was the main goal of opposing factions (Culbert 1993:84; Schele and Miller 1986:220). High status adversaries, often kings of opposing polities, were prized captives and their defeat was often commemorated in the title of a victorious ruler, advocating their participation in battles and their identity as skilled warriors (Inomata and Triadan 2009).

The ritualistic sacrifices of war captives were presented on the steps of large structures allowing for an audience to gather in the plaza below and witness the events. The staging of public rituals provided the opportunity for the non-elites and other members of the polity, possibly even the entire population to witness the practices and events of war that they were not
likely to observe otherwise. The re-enactment and re-experiencing of the battle was not only an important practice for the warrior but for the larger community as well. The notion that sacrifices were carried out for large audiences is strengthened by the numerous artistic depictions that show rulers presented on stairways, adorned in elaborate attire, increasing their visibility for the masses below (Inomata and Triadan 2009). Thus, public ritual sacrifices also served a social role. The rites, in a sense, were the culmination of a battle, with the height of drama, the execution of enemies, being delayed until this moment when all members of the community could participate. The sacrifices created a community through the shared experience of the ceremony, as well as providing tangible evidence of the triumph. This affirmation of victory demonstrated and solidified the power of the warriors, especially that of the king. Through the assertion of power, manifested by the imposition of death, social order was constructed by the ruler, the elites and the commoners (Inomata and Triadan 2009), with social roles being enforced by the roles of participant and viewer in the ceremonies.

**Bonampak and Yaxchilan**

The Classic period Maya site of Bonampak, in modern Chiapas, Mexico contains the “greatest pictorial art of the pre-Columbian world” (Lynch 1964:23). A small, compact site, Bonampak is located roughly 30km south of Yaxchilan (Figure 1), a Maya polity with which it had a strong inter-political relationship. Some archaeologists have called Bonampak “crassly provincial” due to its spatial and architectural insignificance (Lynch 1964:23). It is clear, however, that Bonampak is a noteworthy site due to the important information about politics and warfare that is gained from an investigation into the works of art found there. This insight is achieved through an examination of the depictions on stelae, lintels, and murals of an eighth-century ruler of Bonampak, Chaan-Muan II (A.D. 776 – c. 795). Images that show the military
exploits and rituals preformed by Chaan-Muan II demonstrate the way in which Maya kings established their power and authority in Classic society.

Information about other political practices can also be determined from these representations. Bonampak, as mentioned, was closely tied with the near-by polity of Yaxchilan, forming “perhaps the most interesting inter-polity relationship” of the Classic Maya civilization (Culbert 1991:80). From the iconographic similarities and the records from the accompanying inscriptions in the works commissioned by Chaan-Muan II at Bonampak, and works found at Yaxchilan, it is clear that a close militaristic alliance existed between the two polities. There is also evidence that the practice of intermarriage and joint warfare endeavors between the two dynasties ultimately strengthened the partnership between the two.

One of the great Classic Maya centers, the origins of Yaxchilan are virtually unknown. A dynastic record gives a foundation date in the fourth century A.D. but it’s not until the reign of eighth-century ruler Shield Jaguar II that a detailed historical record is available (Martin and Grube 2000:117; Culbert 1991:78). Acceding to the throne in A.D. 681, Shield Jaguar II, also known as Itzamnaaj B’alam or Shield Jaguar the Great, remained in power for sixty years, commissioning a host of buildings endowed with lintels and stelae containing a militaristic and authoritative emphasis. He is also the grandfather of Shield Jaguar III, the last of Yaxchilan’s major kings, who ascended to the throne in A.D. 769 (Martin and Grube 200:123, 134, 136). Shield Jaguar III is depicted in the Bonampak murals, as well as Lintel 2, and mentioned in hieroglyphic texts throughout Bonampak, reaffirming the relationship between the two polities and rulers.
The Bonampak Murals

The occupation of the Bonampak site dates to the Early Classic period (Coe 1993:108) and lasted until the end of the Late Classic. The core of the settlement is formed by the acropolis overlooking a large plaza below. Located on the first terrace of the acropolis is Structure 1, a rectangular building that measures 17 meters in length and contains the famous murals of Bonampak. The murals depict dynastic activities and rituals preformed by hundreds of members of the Bonampak court that are not illustrated on any other medium (McKillop 2004: 253), providing primary evidence for the practices of warfare, and court life of Classic Maya civilization.

Although surviving examples are somewhat limited today, mural paintings appear to have been prevalent on Maya buildings, rooms, and tombs. The Bonampak murals decorate the walls of three equally sized rooms, each room containing a wide-set bench running along the perimeter, suggesting that the murals were intended to be viewed from the vantage point offered by these benches (Sharer and Morley 1994:254).

Archaeologists have inferred that the scenes in the three rooms represent a continuous narrative of ritual events, taking place between A.D. 790 and 792 (Miller 1986:23). The narrative sequence begins in Room 1 with the presentation of an unnamed adolescent heir, the son of Chaan-Muan II, to the Bonampak royal court and the celebrations accompanying this ceremony. Continuing in Room 2 and 3 the account shows Chaan-Muan II and other Bonampak elites taking captives, subsequently torturing and sacrificing them, and performing their own ritual blood letting, all to validate the position of the heir (Lynch 1964:24; Miller 1986:25). From other archaeological research it is known that accession rites were some of the most important celebrations in ancient societies. The transition of a dynasty was a critical moment in which a ruling family had to publicly reestablish itself and convincingly maintain its
authoritative rule. Therefore the rituals associated with the designation of a new heir were multifaceted, including events such as grand ceremonies, ritual combat and human sacrifices; the very actions with which rulers establish their authority (Miller 1986:150). These events are all portrayed in the narrative of the Bonampak murals and support the claim that these murals are sequential, with the intention of commemorating and establishing the reign of the new heir at Bonampak.

Although the murals supply a wealth of information on the practices of the elite in the court of the Maya, for the purposes of this paper I will focus on the portrayal of various aspects of Maya warfare and the ritualized aspects of war in the murals. I will pay particular attention to Room 2 given the importance of these scenes for providing insight into the practices of ritualized warfare in the Classic Maya society.

**Room 1**

Room 1, the iconographic beginning of the narrative, contains images of a large courtly procession around the walls of the room (Figure 2). On the upper sections of the east, south and west walls the presentation of the unknown child heir is witnessed by a number of lords, members of the royal court, and the royal family (Figure 3). Seated on the throne, within what appears to be a palatial setting, the royal family, notably Chaan-Muan II and his wife Lady Rabbit, observe the installation of the young heir (Miller 1986:69). The elaboration of the ceremony and the celebration serves to solidify the royal power and prestige of the dynasty, especially the authority of Chaan-Muan II and the newly appointed heir (McKillop 2004:178; Miller 1986:70). In addition to the glimpse into the ceremony of the heir’s accession, the murals of Room 1 serve as important evidence for Maya court life, showing the variation in costume and character of individual lords as well the practices of these elites (McKillop 2004:253).
Although he has yet to be identified, the Yaxchilan ruler Shield Jaguar III is mentioned within the hieroglyphic texts as being present at the scene in Room 1 (Miller 1986: 36). It is not known exactly what his role was in the ceremony depicted, but, based on the close relationship between the two polities, it is likely that Shield Jaguar III is presiding over the heir recognition rites, further strengthening the belief that Yaxchilan played a dominant role to Bonampak (Drew 1999:258).

**Room 2**

The narrative takes a turn in Room 2 with the murals that dominate the eastern, southern and western walls displaying a panoramic battle scene (Figure 4). This mural is an energetically portrayed combat scene that shows the hand-to-hand tactics utilized by the Maya elites (Sharer and Morley 1994:255). The melee of Maya warriors displays great intensity and strength, yet unlike many Western representations associated with war, this scene is devoid of actual violent bloodshed. Instead, warriors focus their attention on the capture rather than the slaughter of their enemies.

On the walls of Room 2 is a chaotic mass of warriors, elaborately dressed in their armored finery, fighting their enemies with hand-held spears. In the midst of the action Chaan-Muan II, the central, dominating figure, is shown in an ornate headdress, wearing a jaguar pelt. He firmly grips the hair of a vanquished enemy, who will likely fall victim to one of the forms of ritual sacrifice (Figure 5). The illustration of Chaan-Muan II as the war leader, physically participating in the skirmish is significant because through the success of military achievements his status and prestige is confirmed and maintained. As an almost constant fixture in Maya life, warfare was a considerable source of power; captives who were ritually sacrificed provided the basis for ceremonial events and the glorification of the king. Those captives who were well-known personages or even kings were commemorated in the king’s title (Culbert 1993:84).
The northern wall of Room 2 shows the most famous section of the narrative, one that Paul Rivet (1960:198) classifies as “undoubtedly, the masterpieces of Maya painting” (Figure 6). This wall depicts the aftermath of the battle: the presentation and punishment of the prisoners taken captive in the previous mural scenes. This realistic portrayal of these events is depicted on a series of seven steps leading up to a platform, possibly the actual steps of the acropolis of Bonampak (Coe 1993:104). At the top of the platform and at the focus of the scene stands Chaan-Muan II, presiding over the captives retrieved in the battle (Figure 7). On Chaan-Muan II’s left are allied warriors including Shield Jaguar III of Yaxchilan, who extends his arm towards the Bonampak king (Drew 1999:340). The prisoners are huddled on the steps. Having been tortured, blood runs from their fingernails and down the hands of many of the victims (Sharer 1994:255). A principle captive kneels at the feet of Chaan-Muan II, looking up at the ruler who does not look down to meet his gaze (Miller 1986:124). This portrayal of “defeat, suffering and resignation to fate” of prisoners (Rivet 1960:198-99) is a common convention in Maya artistic representation. The portrayal of Chaan-Muan II dominating captives in this fashion is seen not only in the Bonampak murals, but also in other mediums throughout the Bonampak site. This conventional portrayal of the ruler who takes forceful possession of his captive, or is shown standing over a captive, who is gesturing submissively, can be seen on Stela 3 placed on the acropolis steps and Lintel 1 within Structure 1 (Figures 13 and 15). Analyzed together these similar depictions, which are found throughout Bonampak, are key to the understanding of politics in Maya society.

Room 3

The final scene of the narrative sequence in Structure 1 is contained in Room 3. The most poorly preserved of the rooms, the fragmentary images and lack of legible text leave little explanation about the subject (Miller 1986:131). Based on context and the meaning that can be
derived from all three of the murals, archaeologists such as Mary Miller (1986) have argued that in Room 3 the protagonist, Chaan-Muan II, has returned. He is shown with his wife Lady Rabbit, and the adolescent heir that appeared in Room 1. The royal family is enthroned as a unified group, on the upper east wall (Figure 8) and is no doubt performing a bloodletting ritual. Within the context of the murals from Room 1 and 2, this final act of sacred blood offerings can be considered the finalization of the previous rites and the accession ceremonies (Miller 1986:149).

In addition to its significance in depicting the rituals associated with rites of accession and heir recognition, the mural in Room 3, is also important in its display of Maya women in a ritual context. Although a full assessment of the role of women in Maya society would be too extensive to include within this paper, it is important to mention the role and function elite women served, as shown at both Bonampak and Yaxchilan.

The Ritual Performance of Elite Maya Women

Lintel 24 (Figures 9 and 11), one of the door lintels of Temple 23 at Yaxchilan, shares visible similarities in artistic depiction of a bloodletting ritual with that preformed by the wife of Chaan-Muan II in the murals from Room 3 at Bonampak. Lintel 24 is considered to be one of “the most impressive sculptures at Yaxchilan” and “arguably the finest relief-carving to survive in the Maya region” (Martin and Grube 2000:125). Placed in the structure that is the house of Lady Xoc, the principal wife of king Shield Jaguar II of Yaxchilan (Martin and Grube 2000:125), the lintel depicts the gruesome act of auto-sacrifice (Figure 10). Shield Jaguar II stands over his wife with a torch, suggesting this ritual took place in what could be the interior of a temple, or possibly at night. Lady Xoc is kneeling and, in one of the more shocking depictions of Maya rituals, pulls a spiky, thorn-laden cord through her tongue (Schele and Miller 1986:186).
At her feet is a basket containing bark paper strips meant to catch the blood that will later be burnt as an offering to sustain the gods (Drew 1999:249). The inscriptions that accompany this representation record the date, A.D. 709, as well as the event, specifying that Shield Jaguar II will also be letting blood (Schele and Miller 1986:187). The bloodletting scene depicted on Lintel 24 at Yaxchilán relates directly to the murals in Room 3 at Bonampak. In both scenes the king and his wife are seen participating in the same bloodletting ritual, as indicated by the presence of bark paper and the spiked cords (Schele and Miller 1986:148).

These bloodletting rituals, as well as ceremonies of accession and heir recognition recorded on monuments are the primary context in which most elite Maya women appear in Classic Period representation (Josserand 2002:118,128). It appears as though important elite women, such as the principal wife of the king, occasionally enjoyed a status equal to their husbands. This emphasizes the importance of the political roles some women played in Maya society.

Kinship systems in Maya polities were probably patrilineal and the role of women in linking these patrilines through marriage was an important part of social and political life in Maya society. Women provided the linkage between various kin groups, and even distinct polities, providing alliances and financial, social and political support (Josserand 2002:119). Due to their role in connecting different groups, the wives and mothers are often mentioned in hieroglyphic texts in association with their sons or husbands. This can be seen on Stela 2 of Bonampak (Figure 12), which depicts the ruler Chaan-Muan II with his wife and his mother, whose title includes “mother of” (Josserand 2002: 121). In addition to providing information about the practice of intermarriage and its use to solidify relationships and alliances in the Mesoamerican lowlands, an examination of Stela 2 yields important information about
Bonampak king Chaan-Muan II and the political relationships of the Classic Maya polities of Bonampak and Yaxchilan.

**Political Relationships between Bonampak and Yaxchilan**

Stela 2 of Bonampak portrays the protagonist of the murals in Structure 1, the last known ruler of Bonampak, Chaan-Muan II, dressed in a large ceremonial headdress and in the presence of two women. The inscription on Stela 2 names Chaan-Muan II, along with the addition of the name “ah-5-Skull”, a prominent captive captured by Chaan-Muan II which has now become part of his title, a common practice of Maya rulers (Mathews 1980:66). A similar reference is also found on Lintel 1 in Structure 1 at Bonampak. The text on the lintel supplies important information about Chaan-Muan II that might otherwise have remained unknown, such as the date of his accession to rule on 9.17.5.8.9 [June 15, A.D. 776] for example (Culbert 1991:80).

The emblem glyphs on Stela 2 also provide identities for the two women shown with Chaan-Muan II. There is evidence that the woman on the right side of the stela is the mother of Chaan-Muan II, and the woman standing behind him is his wife (Mathews 1980:61). In proximity to this figure is a glyph that names her “Lady Yax-Rabbit from Yaxchilan” and it is accompanied by the symbol denoting royalty (Mathews 1980:61). Additionally, on Stela 1, as well as in the main text of Room 1 in Structure 1, a relationship glyph has been discovered, identifying Lady Rabbit as a relative of Shield Jaguar III, ruler of Yaxchilan (Culbert 1991:80). This evidence suggests that Chaan-Muan II, king of Bonampak married into Shield Jaguars III’s family, reinforcing the alliance between the two polities. This realization is a significant piece of evidence because it proves that the two sites had a complex political relationship that included the practice of intermarriage (Culbert 1991:79).
Recent epigraphic decipherment demonstrates that systems of trade, marriage and war had formed by the sixth century, allowing for coordinated warfare and political alliances among many polities in the lowlands (Demarest 2004:108). Texts from Bonampak and Yaxchilan indicate the close ties between the two polities. The Bonampak murals indicate that, while allied politically and militaristically, Bonampak may have played a subordinate role to that of Yaxchilan for most of the Late Classic period (Drew 1999:258). The images and events depicted on the mural were, in effect, portrayed with the express approval of the overlord of Yaxchilan. In this regard, lintels contained within Structure 1 at Bonampak are important in the context of conventional captive representation, as well as the recording of a specific captive taken by Chaan-Muan II and providing evidence for allied militaristic endeavors between Bonampak and Yaxchilan.

Lintel 1 (Figure 13), above the entrance to Room 1, is a conquest scene that shows the captor, Chaan-Muan II, holding a spear in his hand, grasping the hair of his captive (Mathews 1980:64). The act of seizing a captive’s hair is also depicted in the battle scene decorating Room 2, to which it is in close proximity. Consequently, the similarities between the two scenes in such details and parallel execution, as well as the corresponding subject matter, present a standard depiction of royal figures and help to define the source of their power in Maya culture.

This conventional representation is also visible in Lintel 2 (Figure 14) from Room 2. It depicts Yaxchilan’s Shield Jaguar III taking a captive, presumably during battle. The two lintels are almost identical in their depiction of the two leaders, providing a visual connection that is enhanced by the hieroglyphic texts that appear on both lintels. Each lintel begins with a long count date that records the depicted captures (Mathews 1980:67). The date given for the victory of the Yaxchilan king is four days before that of Chaan-Muan II’s captive taking (Culbert 1991:80). These events, depicted in the same locale in Bonampak and recorded within days of each
other suggest that the warriors of Yaxchilan and Bonampak were participating in a joint military action (Mathews 1980:67). Coupled with the appearance of Shield Jaguar III in the sacrificial scenes of the murals in Room 2, this evidence provides direct confirmation of joint warfare endeavors (Drew 1999:340). Shield Jaguar III’s presence in the Room 1 scene would also suggest that their tie united the two rulers in multiple rituals.

The similarities in depiction are common throughout many of the representations found at both Yaxchilan and Bonampak. This parallel suggests a sharing of ideas and resemblance in ways the two rulers emphasized their power and strengthened their alliance. This is especially true of the depictions showing the capturing of captives and domination, as seen in the murals and Lintels 1 and 2 at Bonampak.

Stela 3 (Figure 15) and the mural of the presentation of prisoners in Room 2 of Structure 1 are also closely related thematically. In each representation, the relationship between Chaan-Muan II and the prisoners is almost identical, with the king standing over the captive who looks up at him in compliance, signifying the power and supremacy that he has over his prisoner (Mathews 1980:64). This pose is repeated on many Classic Maya stelae and can be seen in various other sites throughout the southern lowlands, including Bonampak’s neighboring polity Yaxchilan.

At Yaxchilan, Stela 18 (Figure 16) is an impressive portrayal that mirrors the representations of Chaan-Muan II in Stela 3. This stela shows the ruling lord of the neighboring polity, Shield Jaguar II. He is depicted standing, towering over his captive, in his full ceremonial regalia, with his spear prominently displayed. The iconography of these commemorative stelae serves to glorify and establish the rulers as authoritative warrior figures. This process of glorification that is contained in their representations is aided by the emblem glyphs that appear along-side the illustrations. The inscriptions, when translated, provide extensive insight into the
events depicted on such works and suggest a deep political and cultural connection between the Bonampak and Yaxchilan polities.

**Conclusions**

The imagery at Bonampak and Yaxchilan shows that the rulers of these Classic Maya polities used art to establish authority, as well as to demonstrate their political power. This was achieved through the depiction of rulers such as Chaan-Muan II, Shield Jaguar II, and Shield Jaguar III as warrior figures, emphasizing their militaristic roles. The images of the practices of captive capture and public sacrifice provide glimpses into the social structures of the Maya, and illustrate the ways ritualized warfare was utilized to create a sense of community. This unity is created through the shared experiences of public sacrificial ceremonies. The inclusion of non-elites within the ritual context also reaffirms the considerable importance ritualized warfare played in maintaining the status of kings in Classic Maya society. Being observed by the community performing his roles as military, religious, and political leader allowed for the king to uphold his position of power over the public.

The nature of political relationships between polities in the Classic Maya lowlands can be seen in the inscriptions that tie Bonampak and Yaxchilan together. They highlight the importance of intermarriage in maintaining alliances. This practice also indicates the importance of elite women within the kinship system, linking families and providing solid partnerships. The role of women within a ritual context is emphasized by the depictions of their role in bloodletting rituals. In addition to the roles of women, the murals at Bonampak provide primary evidence for life in the Bonampak court, and “dynastic activities that are not depicted elsewhere” (McKillop 2004: 253).
The artistic and inscriptional records of both Bonampak and Yaxchilan provide a vivid description of the complex political and ritualistic aspects of warfare, accession, bloodletting rituals, captive sacrifice, public display, alliance, and kingship among the Classic Maya. It has been noted that the paintings, never finished, record events that took place not long before the Bonampak settlement was abandoned. Mary Miller (1986:151) has observed that the scene in Room 2 was likely the last victorious battle involving Bonampak and that the unnamed heir depicted within Structure 1 never took the throne. Ultimately Bonampak fell prey to the same fate as many other settlements of the Maya lowlands – a decline that culminated in the phenomenon known as the collapse of the Classic Maya civilization.
Figure 1: Map of Maya Settlements in the Lowlands of Mesoamerica (Miller 1986)

Figure 2: Reconstructed East Wall of Room 1, Structure 1, Bonampak (Miller, 1986).

Figure 3: Reconstructed West Wall, Room 1, Structure 1, Bonampak (Miller 1986).
Figure 4: Reconstructed Battle Scene from the South Wall, Room 2, Structure 1, Bonampak (Miller and Martin 2004:164).

Figure 5: Digitally restored detail of the Battle Scene from the South Wall, Room 2, Structure 1 Bonampak, showing Muan Chaan II on the left and Sheild Jaguar III on the right (Martin and Grube 2000:136).
Figure 6: Reconstruction of Captive Presentation scene from North Wall, Room 2, Structure 1, Bonampak (Miller and Martin 2004:174).

Figure 7: Digitally restored detail of Captive Presentation scene from North Wall, Room 2, Structure 1, Bonampak (http://www.markamusica.com/Maps/BonampakMural.gif).
Figure 8: Detail, East Wall, Room 3, Structure 1, Bonampak (Miller 1999:178).

Figure 9: Lintel 24, Structure 23, Yaxchilan (Miller and Martin 2004:106).

Figure 10: Detail, Lintel 24, Structure 23, Yaxchilan (Miller and Martin 2004:106).

Figure 11: Drawing, Lintel 24, Structure 23, Yaxchilan (Martin and Grube 2000:125).
Figure 12: Stela 2, Bonampak
(Mathews 1980:62)

Figure 13: Lintel 1, Room 1, Structure 1, Bonampak
(Mathews 1980:66)

Figure 14: Lintel 2, Room 2, Structure 1, Bonampak
(Mathews 1980:68)
Figure 15: Stela 3, Bonampak (Mathews 1980:65).

Figure 16: Stela 18, Yaxchilan (Martin and Grube 2000:123).
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