

SOCIAL CHANGE AND GAMES OF CHANCE AT THE SITE OF GALLON
JUG

By

NICHOLAS C. KOPP

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Thesis Chair: Dr. Brigitte Kovacevich

Committee Member: Dr. Michael Callaghan

ABSTRACT

During the 2019 field season of the Chan Chich Archaeological Project (CCAP)/Belize Estates Archaeological Survey Team's (BEAST) work in northwestern Belize, excavations commenced at an elite household at the site of Gallon Jug, named Courtyard B-1. Excavations revealed intriguing details about the lives of the inhabitants through the presence of burials, ceramics, architecture, and – as is central to this research – Patolli boards. Patolli, a prehistoric game of chance played throughout Mesoamerica, is a relatively under researched topic within the field of archaeology. In this thesis I argue that the patolli boards at Gallon Jug portray evidence of elite competition and shifts to social dynamics at the site. Through the analysis of setting, symbolism and the available data regarding Patolli across the Maya region, this research shows that even something as seemingly mundane as a game of chance can yield valuable insights into the lives of those who played them.

DEDICATION

To my dad, mom, and brother who have supported and pushed me to pursue the highest heights of my passions. I truly could not have achieved any of this without your unwavering love and care.

To my best friends, Molly, Alice, Blake, Ben, and Robbie.

To my dog, Samwise, who helps me get away from all the craziness.

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INTRODUCTION

During the 2019 field season of the Chan Chich Archaeological Project (CCAP)/Belize Estates Archaeological Survey Team's (BEAST) work in northwestern Belize, I was part of a team who commenced a household excavation at the Maya site of Gallon Jug, named Courtyard B-1. The archaeological site is within the Maya region of Mesoamerica which encompassed parts of present-day Guatemala, Belize, and the Yucatan. Evidence suggests that the site was occupied as early as the Late Pre-Classic and Early Classic periods, or around B.C.E 400 to 600 C.E. These excavations revealed intriguing details about the lives of the inhabitants through the presence of burials, ceramics, architecture, and—as is central to this research—*Patolli* boards. *Patolli*, a prehistoric game of chance played throughout Mesoamerica, is a relatively under-researched topic within the field of archaeology, being confined to ethnohistoric accounts of the games or a few select pieces of contemporary work (Fecher 2019; Walden & Voorhies 2017; Wanyerka 1999).

Because *Patolli* was generally found within privileged and influential public venues such as in civic-ceremonial centers or administrative and religious buildings, it follows that the presence of the game in these settings made *Patolli* a *de facto* privileged and influential artifact (e.g., *elite by association*) as a tethered symbol to elite culture. Finding *patolli* boards in an elite household, therefore, made it a potentially useful tool in bolstering that household's status within society, especially for those who would endeavor to be upwardly mobile within the community.

This study considers how the Gallon Jug patolli boards were used to facilitate social upward mobility; specifically, how the possession of patolli boards within a private domain household may have been used to gain social status and recognition within the larger elite community.

In particular, this study hopes to answer the following questions:

- 1) How can we account for the presence of Patolli in the private domain?
- 2) Was the Patolli repurposed within the private domain to facilitate and reinforce upward mobility within the elite class?

I argue that the presence of the patolli boards in this residential context suggests that the inhabitants of the household were utilizing the game to leverage their status and compete with others within elite culture. This study will use setting analysis, symbolism and the extant literature regarding Patolli across the Maya region. As is explored in the following chapter, analyzing patolli boards in the context of sensemaking and symbolism is an opportunity to view the inhabitants of Gallon Jug as active agents in their community; agents who may have utilized artifacts at their disposal to upwardly shift and/or maintain their position in elite society, a relevant research stream for archaeology today. Accordingly, Patolli emerges as a worthwhile subject worthy of increased study.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study is bounded by delimitations and limitations. As previously stated, one major limitation is, because it is relatively under-researched, there is a dearth of literature regarding Patolli and, as a result, it may be difficult locating concurring or validating research; as a result, any conclusions to this research are bounded to my experiences after excavated at the Gallon Jug site. Any interpretations, findings and conclusions stated are in the context of Gallon Jug as an instrumental case study, which is qualitative and are not meant to be generalizable.

Furthermore, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were limited in a second season of excavations at Gallon Jug and they were unable to take place. As a result, future excavations are fertile ground for future research on the game of Patolli. Future research could include the time-depth of the Gallon Jug patolli boards, if there were previous iterations within the plaster floor, and more relational artifactual/architectural data.

BACKGROUND

Patolli

Patolli is a game of chance found throughout prehistoric Mesoamerican societies often involving gambling and rituals related to the calendar (Walden & Voorhies 2017). The game is found in cultures including the Maya, Aztec, and Mixtec (among many others). Depictions of the ancient game can be found in many manuscripts dating to the contact period and depict some of the circumstances and settings in which the game was played. For example, Sahagún examines the Aztec variation in the Florentine Codex – which was a highly recreational—though still a ritually driven event (Sahagún 2012; Voorhies 2013). In the codex, the game is often portrayed with patron deities beside it, further indicating the ritual importance the game maintained within Aztec culture. Early depictions by Europeans also assumed the game was of Asiatic origin, with its similarities to some Asian games of chance, such as parchisi, though these games developed independently of each other (Tylor 1879).

The game was played by moving game pieces on a board, depending on the throwing of patol beans, which is where the game derives its name. The Maya variant of the game, which is the focus of this research, appears to have been utilized primarily during the Late Classic and Early Postclassic periods (Walden & Voorhies 2017). Patolli boards are generally categorized as Maya graffiti, since they are generally engraved into floors or walls. The term graffiti, however, is largely misleading in this context, as (within Western culture) it implies a lack of importance to what has been created. Due to the nature of graffiti like patolli boards, it is difficult to ascertain the exact times in which the boards were created, meaning that a *terminus post quem* is often the best estimate available based on contextual data. The game was also likely related to

the calendar, as at sites like Tikal the boards are incised within an E-group, which would have afforded those using the boards view of important calendrical and astronomical events (Walden & Voorhies 2017). Given limited data regarding the uses of Patolli, interpretations regarding the game are somewhat scant, though further investigations into the topic may pursue some intriguing avenues. For example, at nearby Chan Chich a patolli game board had been etched into a bench which contained a burial, implying the game may have had some relation to mortuary practice, though examples of this are few as of yet (Harrison 2000).

Beyond contact-period manuscripts, the game of Patolli, as previously stated, is a topic within Mesoamerican archaeology that has only been sparsely studied and, particularly, that of the Maya variation of the game. Of the small amount of research conducted on the topic, the most in-depth analysis of the game can be found in Walden & Voorhies (2017). In her work, which this study draws upon, it becomes clear that the presence of patolli boards at Maya sites is relatively common, but despite this, no exhaustive analysis of the game has been conducted. Unlike the Aztec variation of the game, which was recorded more completely during the Conquest period, the Maya variation remains relatively untouched in the realm of research and interpretation.

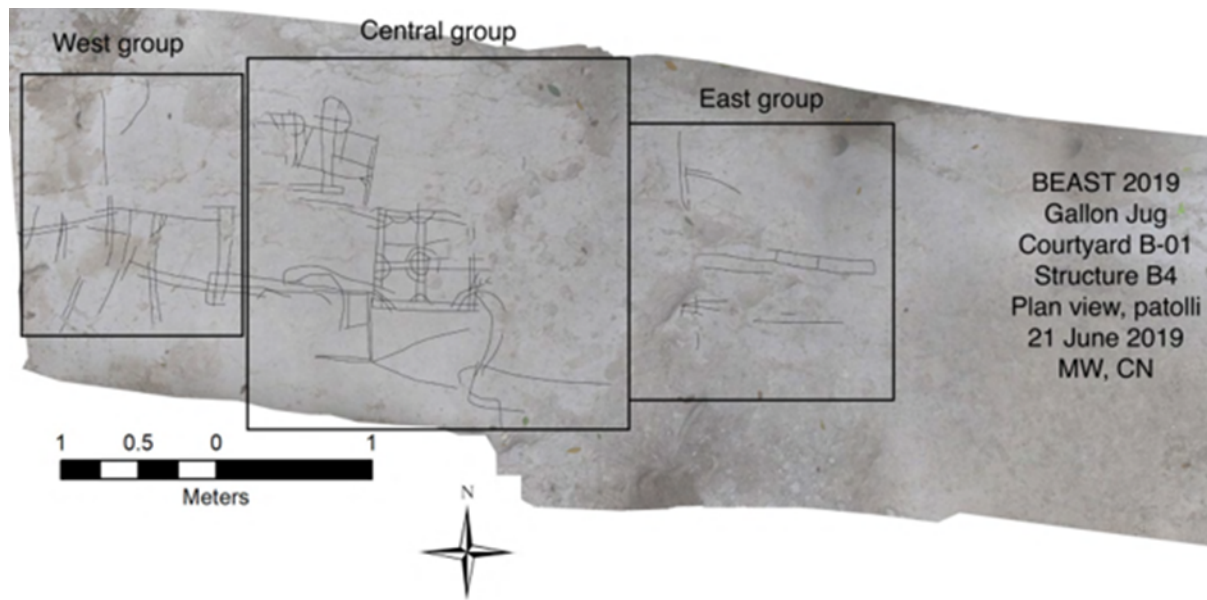
In her research, Walden & Voorhies (2017) observed the presence of the game at over sixty sites, including sites that exhibited large amounts of regional influence such as Calakmul, Copán, and Tikal. When evaluating this data, certain themes start to emerge. In particular, the game is generally found in civic-ceremonial centers in the presence of or within administrative and religious buildings. This could imply that the game had symbolic meaning in relation to elite

culture, making it a potentially useful tool in bolstering one's status in elite society, as is explored in the following chapters.

Within our own culture, games of chance are generally classified as hobbies or within the context of gambling. Games of chance, within Western culture, do not appear to be within the realm of the every-day/mundane and this is perhaps the reason that the game of Patolli has been left relatively unstudied by researchers. Western ideas regarding games of chance portray them as unessential to the day-to-day progressions of life and a diversion from activities of consequence. While this view of these games may compliment Western culture, data suggests that Mesoamerican cultures maintained a substantially different perspective on the topic (Walden & Voorhies 2017; Wanyerka 1999). Within the context of the Maya, the game of Patolli was often found to be used by individuals in positions of administrative, divine, and community importance. The presence of patolli boards within temples and administrative buildings at notable and influential sites such as Uxmal, Palenque, and Naranjo further indicates that the game was far more than a mere hobby of the Maya and may be utilized to also understand the larger social structures within Maya culture (Fecher 2019; Voorhies 2013; Wanyerka 1999).

Games of chance also have immense time-depth for the Maya, with modern games of chance being utilized by contemporary Maya. For instance, the game of *bul*, which is played by contemporary Mopan and K'ekchi' Maya (Verbeeck 1998), is a game of chance employed to ensure a successful growth cycle of a season's crops. The game itself, while played differently than the game of Patolli, demonstrates that the Maya employed games of chance throughout time as an important tool with the power to affect the world around them.

As the work of Walden and Voorhies explains, Patolli is hardly uncommon and can be found throughout much of the Maya region (Walden & Voorhies 2017). As explored above, the context in which the game is found in locations of administration, religious, or community importance. Furthermore, within these contexts the game is found most often in secluded and private locations, which may suggest it was generally restricted to, and only observed by a small group of (likely) elite individuals. If, for example, a diviner utilized the board – as Walden & Voorhies (2017) suggests – as a method of accessing the power or gifts of the unseen world, it follows that only a few important or distinguished individuals may be able to observe the process. Given that, as Walden and Voorhies (2017) puts it, “the majority of Maya patolli boards are located in religious contexts” (212), it seems probable that religious administrators would have been employed by those in power for the purpose of religious and ritual rites. For an elite individual to then take the boards and move it to a new, unconventional context may be evidence of shifting social standings or an attempt by a specific lineage to derive power within the confines of the elite subculture of Gallon Jug.



Figure, 1. Top view of Structure B4 plaster floor, with patolli present (Novotny et al. 2019).

The Maya

The Maya are one of the many pre-Columbian cultures that have inhabited Mesoamerica for thousands of years, particularly the regions now contained within the Yucatan, Guatemala, and Belize though their influence can be seen throughout Mesoamerica. Maya culture has immense time-depth, covering thousands of years and extending into the present (Sharer & Traxler 2006). Throughout the history of the Maya, their culture has been responsible for the rise of huge polities that exerted far-reaching regional influence. Sites such as Tikal, Palenque, El Mirador, Chichén Itzá, and countless others. These sites have become the topic of deep archaeological inquiry as they dot the landscape of Mesoamerica, as a testament to the influence of Maya culture.

Gallon Jug

Gallon Jug is an archaeological site in Northeastern Belize first given attention by archaeologists around 1990, after the Gallon Jug Agribusiness had cleared approximately 1,500 acres of land, exposing “several hundred ancient Maya house floors” (Guderjan 1991: 89). Early excavations at Gallon Jug found Late Pre-Classic and Classic ceramics. The household at Courtyard B-1 also seems in agreement with a Late Pre-Classic and Early Classic period of occupation. the site clearly has a deep time-depth, though more excavations will have to take place to piece together a more secure timeline for the site. Guderjan also indicates that researchers were surprised by the number of courtyards located at the site (Guderjan 1991). The site is also located nearby the socio-political center of Chan Chich, which has received considerable archaeological attention (Houk 2016). While the extent of this research pertains to a single household at Gallon Jug, the fact that many more remain unexcavated is useful and intriguing for future research. In addition to the house floors mentioned prior, the site also has its own core, though this has not yet been excavated. As the figure below shows, the site core is substantial.

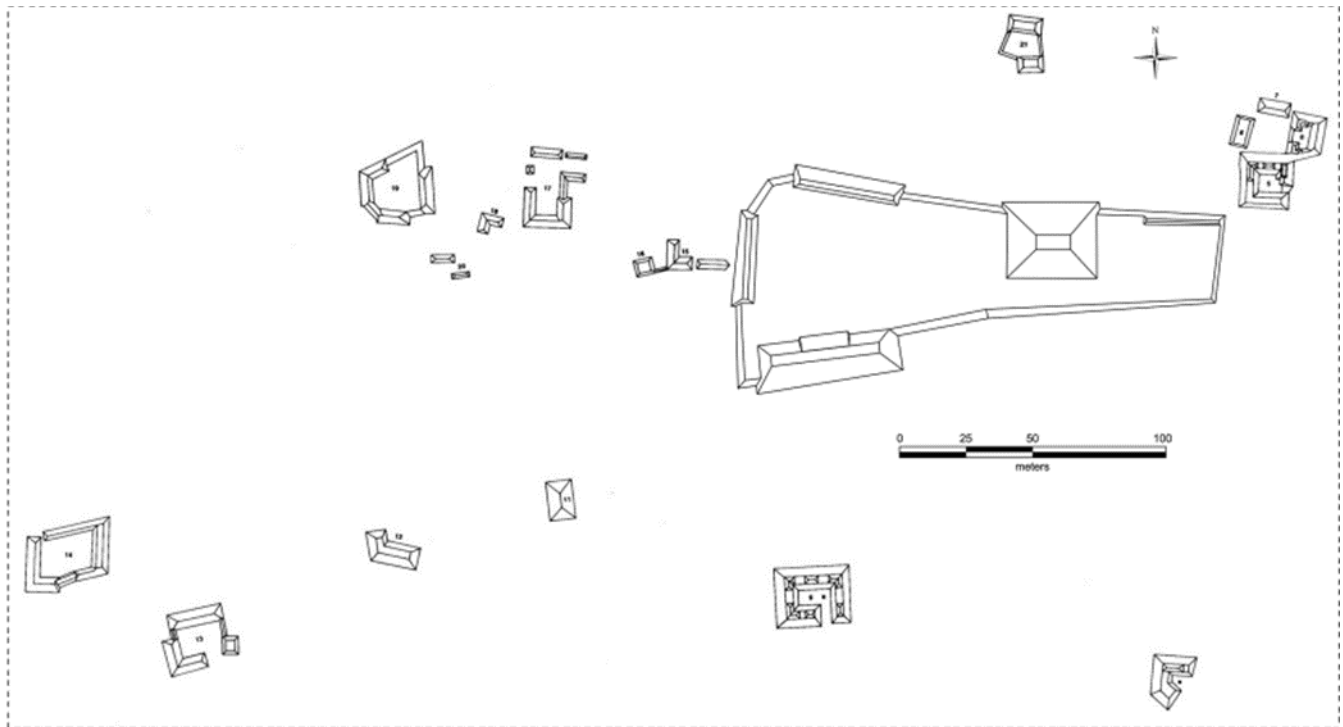


Figure 2. Gallon Jug Site Core (Houk 2019).

In 2016, Willis (2016) conducted a drone survey of the Gallon Jug area. This information was used by BEAST and CCAP to indicate potential locations of ancient architecture and better understand the scope of the Gallon Jug site. In 2019, BEAST focused its efforts on the residential group named Courtyard B-1. The courtyard consists of four structures and covers approximately 25m x 20m (Novotny et al. 2019.). During the 2019 field season, research questions guiding the excavations consisted of uncovering the activities taking place in Courtyard B-1, understanding the health and mobility of residents as compared to those of the nearby Chan Chich, exploring how the construction of the household relates to the construction of the larger site of Gallon Jug, and interpreting shifts to socio-political relationships over time in the region (Novotny et al. 2019). Gallon Jug's relation to the site of Chan Chich was a primary focus, given that both sites were being excavated simultaneously and Chan Chich's relative importance within the region as a semi-substantial socio-political center (Houk 2016).

During the 2019 field season, excavations commenced at an elite residential household at the site of Gallon Jug. The courtyard, titled Courtyard B-1, consists of a central courtyard and three surrounding structures - each of the which has some form of masonry architecture. While each structure was excavated in some form and will be explored in detail in following chapters, the primary focus of this research pertains to Structure B-4. The structure is a large open platform which would have had short stone walls and a perishable superstructure. Structure B-4 is also one of the most open and exposed locations at the residential site, yielding a vantage point over much of the surrounding area. Structure B-4 also consisted of a well-preserved plaster floor approximately 2.7 m wide by 9.25 m long, which has multiple patolli boards engraved into it (Novotny et al. 2019) The presence of these patolli boards is the basis of the questions being assessed in this research – as their presence represents somewhat of an anomaly, given that the game is generally only found in civic-ceremonial, administrative, or religious centers. Furthermore, even in those locations the boards are in highly secluded locations, that would have only enabled a few individuals to be present during their use. In this way, the Patolli at Gallon Jug warrant more analysis, as they deviate from the standard trend data has presented.

Folan et al. (1995), for instance, portrays this in the patolli board found in Structure VII at Calakmul. The patolli board of the structure is in a position that would have been restrictive in access (Folan et al. 1995: 319). Walden and Voorhies (2017) indicate many of the patolli boards that have been found across the Maya region at sites such as Copán , El Cayo, La Mar, and even nearby Chan Chich and, in each example, the patolli boards are found exclusively in areas of administrative, elite, or ritual significance, and in restrictive locations. The patolli found at Chan Chich in room 2 of Structure C-6 exhibit this particularly well – as the patolli boards are located

in the presence of a bench and burial, in an area which Harrison (2000) called an, “elite interior space” (80). Put simply, there is not currently data to suggest Patolli was typically played extensively within the household, though Walden and Voorhies (2017) notes that this may simply be a byproduct of its form in the household not being archaeologically traceable; that is, the game may have been played in the household but using perishable supplies. The lack of household evidence of Patolli may further be related to a lack of household research having been done yet within the field. The inversion seen at Gallon Jug, of the patolli boards being in, arguably, the most public portion of the private domain is thus of interest to this research. Data suggests the boards were utilized for purposes of divination and were intimately tied to ritual and cosmology, and its typical context in elite structures suggests it was an aspect of the upper echelons of Maya culture. Given that the inhabitants of Courtyard B-1 at Gallon Jug were members of the elite and would certainly have been aware of the game’s use, the game’s presence may act as a gateway to understanding social dynamics at the site. At the very least, the presence of patolli game boards at the household site of Gallon Jug may be indicative of the enhanced social status of the inhabitants occupying the residence.

THEORY

Relational Framework

Drawing from Hutson's (2010) prior work, this study examines the *dwelling approach*. The dwelling approach frames humans as relational beings, who derive identity and social intelligibility from their relationship to the world around them. As Hutson (2010:6) states, "Relationships constitute subjects because humans take shape as persons by accommodating themselves in these relationships". Weick (1979) also echoes this concept as a form of "sensemaking", or how people assess their surroundings and then give meaning to their collective experiences, facilitating what and why of people's actions. Using these views as a backdrop for the analysis of the Gallon Jug, Patolli allows us to frame the game-boards as tools of subjectification for the inhabitants of the household. Hutson (2010:7) underscores how, "Objects, be they stone tools, houses, or beaded necklaces, are now seen to work actively in the creation and materialization of identity." An example of the interaction between material culture and identity can be observed in Hutson's description of ear spools, in which he explains how ear spools are diagnostic of cultural milestones within the Maya world - in this way, ear spools are objects while also being much more; they constitute identity by marking a transition in the life of a Maya individual (Hutson 2010). Stemming from this concept, this research suggests that the patolli boards at Gallon Jug were, indeed, objects which played a role in the formation and bolstering of its inhabitants' identities. This is, in large part, due to the game's connection to elite culture which makes it an ideal object to utilize to bolster one's position in the community. Given the game's presence near religious and administrative power, the use of the boards may have even been used by the inhabitants of the household to make ritual predictions about the future, which would certainly have been an effective outlet for gaining social favor.

Another important piece of this theoretical framework upon which my analysis lies are the ideas expressed by *citationality*. Citationality states that the actions of a subject are intelligible within the culture these actions exist in, and only if, they are based upon previous actions or precedents (Hutson 2010). That is, a given action can only make sense if it relates to the logic of previous actions. This does not, of course, mean that change cannot happen, but, rather, that change is most effective and sensible when the shift is within a certain intelligible range or degree away from what is being altered. As a linguistic example, the word “brother” is nowadays often condensed to “bro”. In this example, while there is a clear difference between the words, it is still intelligible to the participants in the conversation. Continuing with this linguistic example, “bro” may also be considered more endearing than “brother”, further portraying how an intelligible change can impact many aspects of what is being altered, particularly its connotative meaning. Interestingly, “bro” is even used outside of the context of family, meaning it can strengthen connections both inside and outside of a kin group.

Within the scope of this research, the Patolli, too, are the objects which exhibit such a degree of change and which demonstrate local modification to the game-boards' more general use and conceptualization within the Maya world. In this framework, the inhabitants of Courtyard B-1 at Gallon Jug were in the process of citing their knowledge and understanding of the game of Patolli, which then shifted it in such a way that was still intelligible to the community housing the patolli boards. More specifically, the residents would be aware of the properties of the game, such as its relation to divination, its acceptable uses, and the symbolism behind it.

As Hutson (2010) puts forth, “It is hard to imagine totally foreign objects” (16). Put in the context of this research, an action or object must be based in precedence for it to be capable of eliciting change; it must be decipherable those interpreting it. Iterating on a symbol or concept is a powerful means of advancement, but a “totally foreign object” would potentially lack the background to be usable. In this way, the patolli boards at Gallon Jug exist both as familiar objects, intelligible to users and observers, as well as objects capable of eliciting change by transforming the traditionally accepted notion of the “how” and the “where” of their use. In the context of elite culture, of which the residents of Courtyard B-1 were members, such conceptual and pragmatic change may indicate a form of local competition within or around this social echelon; perhaps a vying for power and influence within the community, for example.

Further embedded within the idea of relationality is the concept and application of symbolism. Symbolism, within this research, is meant to imply meaning within an object or feature that represents larger social values and paradigms. Maya ceramics, for example, often depict the Hero Twins, which hearkens back to the Maya story of origin. It is not uncommon to find, as Reents-Budet (2008) puts it, ceramics that depict “religious themes that were the ideological foundations of Maya rulership and culture” (72). This form of visual description transcends simple decoration and imbues the ceramic with the values of the Maya story of creation. It is well-documented that the Maya employed many elaborate forms of symbolism in various aspects of their culture, including monuments, ceramics, architectural features, and even within their written language. Maya iconography is perhaps one of the most recognizable examples of such symbolism, as it is deeply rooted in a larger symbolic tradition. As the patolli boards are engraved into the very structure of Gallon Jug, it is productive to discuss the

symbolism likely tied to the boards. Hendon (2010) explores the value of symbolism in archaeological interpretation. Attempting to decode the symbolism of an object helps to, as Hendon herself puts it, “Expand the focus of the object itself” (78). The game-boards exist with more than an exclusively practical purpose. It is important to understand not simply *how* they were used, but also *why* they were used. By understanding the cultural foundation by which the game is supported, it can be better understood why the shift in setting can potentially represent a parallel shift in meaning.

Referring once again to the data collected of Patolli throughout the Maya region, at sites such as Chan Chich (Harrison 2000), Calakmul (Folan et al. 1995), and Copan (Williamson 1996) (among many others), the game is generally found in locations of administrative significance, such as temples and palaces. Furthermore, In Voorhies’s words, “The majority of Maya patolli boards are situated in elite, spatially restricted locations that could accommodate only a small number of people” (Walden & Voorhies 2017: 216). Given the fact that the game was quite restrictive regarding who was able to witness it, the game may have been representative of the elite subculture. For an activity to be restrictive within elite culture itself, it likely symbolizes elite power and is thus a powerful tool to utilize for the gaining of status. As such, the game was clearly tied to elite society and likely carried the connotative symbolism of elite status. In view of this association, the movement of the game-boards from their traditional contexts into the household — the most open part of the household, in fact, which could have sustained many on-lookers — by the inhabitants of Gallon Jug is markedly paradoxical. Analysis of this change in setting as an attempt to enhance the household’s elite status provides an explanation for such an unorthodox patolli board placement.

Setting Analysis

The household is an ideal location for this form of analysis. As various researchers have shown (Hendon 2010; Robin 2013), the household is a powerful unit when considering the ways social change takes place over time and the methods of enacting that change. Robin (2013), for example, explores the various ways in which elites emulated the everyday activities of commoners at the site of Chan. In an aptly named section of Robin's work titled, "Everyday Emancipation" (38), Robin states that, "the emancipatory potential of everyday life arises from [the] ability to question the status quo" (40). The household is an effective location to study the everyday because it is a place of habit and repetition. The reciprocal nature of this repetition can either strengthen current beliefs or encourage modifications to those beliefs. Furthermore, the privacy that the household can yield allows individuals to safely modify the status quo, thus emancipating them. In this way, this study aims to trace the impact that a shift of setting can have on an object and its meaning to its users and observers. The patolli boards at Gallon Jug may have been seen (and perhaps intended) as a challenge to the socially acceptable uses of the game. Whereas data regarding the game show that it is overwhelmingly found in locations of religious, administrative, or communal significance, the boards at Gallon Jug are a clear deviation from this norm. As opposed to the public sector, the household yields individuals the privacy to gradually alter the world around them. Whereas in the public eye, rules and norms may be abided by more thoroughly, the household exists as a location where these constraints or expectations can be eased (Robin 2013). Put against the backdrop of the household as a locus of change and the relational value of material culture, the presence of the game at Gallon Jug portrays an effort by its inhabitants to challenge and compete with others within the confines of elite culture.

Of further interest to the topic of setting is the very particular location where the patolli boards at Gallon Jug were found. The site itself, as previously mentioned, is a residential mound consisting of three buildings. Two of the three buildings excavated at the site consist primarily of masonry architecture. The third structure – named B4 – is unlike the other two in that it is a large, raised open platform that would have maintained a perishable superstructure which afforded a view of the surrounding area. Compared to the location of patolli boards at other sites (even nearby Chan Chich), the boards at Gallon Jug were in an open location, which could have facilitated many participants or observers of the activity.

The game boards are also engraved into the plaster floor of the structure, giving them a character of permanence. This form of permanence is especially of interest to this research. The boards at Gallon Jug represent an intersection of artifactual and architectural data. Unlike an artifact that can be moved, the patolli boards at Gallon Jug are fixed in place; they can only be approached. As many theorists have explored, the built environment often maintains a reciprocal relationship with those who inhabit it (Bourdieu 1977; De Certeau 1984). As individuals alter their built environment, it becomes a part of their everyday lives. In larger contexts, this dynamic results in the intentional construction of causeways and paths that funnel individuals into a particular path (Robin 2013). At Gallon Jug, this dynamic equates to the presence and visibility of the patolli game boards in the most public location of the residence, Structure B4. As the researchers at Gallon Jug themselves put it, “Structure B-4 would have been a fairly large space with a wide entrance, which suggests to us that the activities conducted here—ritual and otherwise—occurred among a group of people instead of as an interpersonal interaction” (Novotny et al. 2019:83). Building on this idea, the patolli boards may have been employed

within the structure in the presence of community members and peers of the residents of the household, bolstering their status and gaining them social capital.

Much as in Bourdieu's Berber house, the built environment is shaped and altered to represent the values and ideals of its inhabitants (Bourdieu 1973). The game-boards at Gallon Jug, by being etched into the environment, enabled the game to be a point of interaction within the household – perhaps affirming the symbolism, meaning, and status tied to the game. The household, in particular, is a useful location - given its inherent privacy - for this reciprocal nature of interaction to take place. Furthermore, as the household is perhaps the primary location of the “every-day”, it enables a high frequency of interaction and affirmation for the ideals and practices which take place in it (Robin 2013). If, for example, the game was played often by the inhabitants of the household, it affirms and normalizes the action. De Certeau (1984) is also apt to reference here, as the engraving of the game-board into the plaster floor is not unlike individuals utilizing shortcuts throughout a city. In essence, the patolli game-board is a circumventing of the typically accepted setting in which the game is played, which mirrors the movement through city shortcuts and alleyways, as De Certeau explores. While not encompassing the same kind of physical movements as the movement through a city, the requisitioning of the game-boards to motivate social mobility is, in essence, a proxy for social climbing. In De Certeau's work, individuals make the shortcuts and paths their own, by utilizing the city in unintended or unexpected ways - this mirrors the explanation of the game-boards put forth in this study.

The use of the patolli boards at Gallon Jug may be an expression of what De Certeau referred to as tactics. In De Certeau (1984), he makes a contrast between the concepts of strategy

and tactic. Strategy is enacted by those in power (city planning, for example) whereas tactics are actions in contrast to those strategies. If the concept of Patolli is the realm of those in power, adapting where it can be used (i.e. putting it in a household) can be considered a tactic employed to push back against those in power.

Having now laid out the theoretical basis for this research, we are left to interpret the central question of this research: How can the patolli boards at Gallon Jug best be accounted for? Given the framework I have put forth, we now attempt to answer that question.

DISCUSSION

As stated in the introduction, this research aims to account for the presence of the game of Patolli in a household context at the site of Gallon Jug. Having already explored the theoretical framework being used for this analysis, this chapter will utilize this foundation to assess the patolli boards.

To begin, it is important to reiterate the proximity the game of Patolli has to elite Maya culture. The game is most typically located within administrative, royal, or religious contexts – often temples and palaces (Walden & Voorhies 2017). Furthermore, patolli boards are generally sequestered to spaces which could only facilitate a few participants, implying that the game is both a private and exclusive activity. The patolli boards at Gallon Jug contradict these principles entirely, with the game-boards present in a household, in a large open space. Its location at Gallon Jug is spacious (2.7 m wide by 9.25 m long) and could have facilitated a significant number of individuals either participating or spectating the game. This reversal may indicate contribution to a form of local competition within the surrounding community. If the inhabitants of Gallon Jug were hosting gatherings, they could then use the game of Patolli as a tool in gaining support and social favor, given that the community understands the typical properties of the game.

Research has often shown the household to be a central site of social change (Hendon 2010; Robin 2013), and thus the Gallon Jug household of study may support and adhere to this concept. The household exists as a perfect stage to cite the activity of patolli and use it to gain favor, while also doing so in a way that is culturally intelligible to the outside community. The game of Patolli also seems like an ideal candidate to facilitate this form of competition, as while

it is tied to divination and ritual, it was also played for the purpose of leisure (Walden & Voorhies 2017). In this way, altering the game in a culturally intelligible way is an outlet to both leisure and ritual. Furthermore, as stated prior, the game appears to be tied to elite culture, and thus likely maintains some level of authority, given its proximity to institutions of power (temples, palaces, ceremonial centers). In other words, the game intersects with various aspects of elite life, and can thus be utilized effectively as a symbol within the community to motivate competition.

This study posits that whoever controlled access to the game would have the ability to gain favor within the community by shifting access and exclusivity to it. The significance of this interpretation is that the strange placement of the patolli boards at the household in question may be indicative of a heterarchical social structure at the larger site of Gallon Jug. Rather than power being directed upwards solely, a heterarchical structure enables individuals across the system to have meaningful impacts and interactions within the community (Crumley 1995). Basically, whereas a hierarchy operates from the “top down”, a heterarchy is more “side to side”. Of course, given the limited excavations that have taken place currently, the idea of heterarchy can currently only be explored in relation to the elite sub-culture living at Gallon Jug. However, it is still intriguing to potentially have evidence of elites vying for power within the community. This trend would certainly be a deviation from ideas such as divine kingship, in which the power is clearly derived from the top. The Maya region is known to have housed various forms of social structures, with smaller sites like Chan being seemingly egalitarian (Robin 2013) and larger sites like Tikal and Copan being hierarchical and maintaining dynastic lines of kings (Sharer & Traxler 2009). The patolli boards may have been a tool utilized to bolster and compete with

various other elite households within the Gallon Jug community. This research relates to questions of the local social mobility and the intricacies of the elite subculture. Current research on the topic of the Maya variation of Patolli is scant and tends to portray it as an object within the confines of Maya life, but does not go much farther. The goal of this research is to show that these objects may be imbued with the power to impact the dynamics of competition and elite status, at the site of Gallon Jug. While this interpretation is not necessarily generalizable within the Maya region, it can inform future research within the region as further excavations take place, while adding to our understanding of the vast array of social dynamics that unfolded within the Maya Region.

CONCLUSION

In concluding this research, I feel it would be beneficial to mention and explain why I see this work as being relevant to the present field of archaeology. Given how much of this work is based in theory, it can be difficult to ascertain the more practical applications of this kind of research. What I aim to show in this concluding section is the various avenues for future research and mention aspects of this research that were hindered due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but may still be interesting directions to explore in future work.

Specifically, this study is most applicable in the context of future excavations at the site of Gallon Jug. If, for example, other households at the larger site of Gallon Jug are excavated in subsequent field seasons, it will be interesting to see if patolli boards are present throughout the site. Furthermore, if the boards do truly represent competition between elites and the attempt by individuals to bolster their social status, it speaks to the diverse and elaborate cultural systems that were present in the ancient Maya world. Furthermore, as so much of household studies are based around identity formation and the day-to-day progression of people's lives, a game of chance like Patolli yields a useful glimpse into the lives of the people who used it. Furthermore, as the topic is studied more, it may also inform researchers of the ways non-elites interacted with these games of chance.

As stated prior, due to the unexpected emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, this research was obliged to depend on the data gathered from only one season of excavation, rather than two. This loss of data is obviously significant, and various valuable questions were unable

to be answered as a result. Consider, during the second season of excavations at Gallon Jug, the patolli boards were going to be exposed once again and excavated. These excavations would have aimed at uncovering the time-depth of the boards by assessing if prior boards had been used at the household in earlier plasters of the floor. Likewise, during our first field season, thousands of ceramic sherds were found on the platform, and a subsequent excavation at the household could have enabled us to understand the relationship between those ceramics and the boards. Beyond these examples, an extra season of excavations simply lends itself to the gathering of large amounts of new data, which could have helped to refine and support (or refute) the interpretation. As such, this research hopes to evoke new questions and ideas as future excavations at Gallon Jug eventually commence. Beyond the site of the Gallon Jug, it is my hope that this research is illuminating regarding what may be compromised when the seemingly mundane is overlooked by researchers.

In sum, while within our own culture, games of chance may represent games of chance, *per se*, within the Maya, we are left with the thought-provoking idea that games of chance—like Patolli—were used also for social mobility and a proxy for social climbing.

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