

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

---



# **Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

MARIA FELICIA REGA

Department of Comparative Religion,  
Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia

Department of Ancient World Studies,  
Sapienza University of Rome, Italy  
*miariafelicia.rega@gmail.com*

## **ABSTRACT**

Ballgame is one of the primary patterns used to describe Mesoamerica as a cultural area. From the first Spanish chroniclers until recent academic research, the study of ballgame and ballcourts has always been an important topic. Many studies focused on the urban and regional distribution of ballcourts, using ballgame as a pattern to understand the political organization of a specific territory. Through a comparative analysis of the main sites of North-East Petén, in Guatemala, starting from Uaxactún territory, and other region in the Maya area, this paper will try to show the differences in social and political dimension of ballgame across the centuries, especially between Late Preclassic and Early Classic.

**KEY WORDS:** ballcourts, ballgame, Guatemala, Maya, Petén, urbanism

## **Introduction**

The Mesoamerican ballgame had a great importance from religious, political and social point

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

---

of view, being one of the greatest institutions in Mesoamerica, surviving for thousands of years.

Many scholars, especially Eric Taladoire, focused on the architectural features of ballcourts and the changes these had across the centuries, in order to determine a scheme which can help to reconstruct a chronological and regional evolution (TALADOIRE 1981, 2001, 2017). On the other hand, the great part of the studies focused on the ritual and religious importance of ballgame, using as main source mythological tales, such the Popol Vuh, the sacred book of the Maya Quiché written in the 16th century, or many iconographic representations which connected ballgame to sacrifice or to the élite ritualism, relating the ballgame practice to the Underworld, to the fight between the opposite such light and dark, day and night (SCHELE – MILLER 1986; SCHELE – FREIDEL 1991; AGUILAR 2003; COLAS – VOSS 2012; VELASQUEZ GARCIA 2016).

Recently, scholars also started to highlight the political and social role that the ballgame had in all Mesoamerica (DANEELS 2008, 2016; MOODIE 2013; STOLL – ANDERSON 2017). A great interest is addressed to the presence of ballcourts in small sites, starting from the studies conducted by John Fox in the Cuyumapa Drainage in Honduras (FOX 1996) and Olivier de Montmollin in the Grijalva Basin in Chiapas (DE MONTMOLLIN 1997). The analysis of regional distribution of ballcourts can be a good pattern to understand political and hierarchal relations among various sites inside a territory or social bonding inside a community, according to the presence of ballcourts and their characteristics.

This analysis will be now applied to a specific region of the Maya Lowland, the Northeast of Petén, in Guatemala, starting from Uaxactún territory, where recent research led to a better understanding of the area surrounding the main city and confirmed the presence of several complexes, including ballcourts.

### **Ballgame as a Cultural Pattern**

In his publication of 1943, Paul Kirchhoff defined the main characteristics, still useful nowadays, to describe Mesoamerica as a cultural area with specific limits (KIRCHHOFF 1966 [1943]). The ballgame was one of the primary cultural patterns which Mesoamerica had in common with other areas – for example the Southwest of United States or the Caribbean area – and, at the same time, is a fixed element across the centuries, from Early Preclassic to current times.

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

---

The first information about the ballgame come from the Spanish chroniclers, especially members of the various religious orders who tried to understand the local religious practices, in order to convert the population to the Christian religion. One of the best examples is one of the books written by Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España* (General History of the Things of New Spain), which gave us information especially about the Nahua area<sup>1</sup>.

Putting together this information, it is possible to understand that, by the end of the Postclassic Period and the beginning of Colonial era, the ballgame was used not only for ritual purposes, but also as amusement. Comparing the historical sources with some modern practices – *Ulama*<sup>2</sup>, *Pelota mixteca* (Mixtec ballgame), and others – it is possible to reconstruct the way the game was played (MILLER 2001:81; BARROIS 2006:21; FASH – FASH 2007:267), even if it is possible that the practice had different meanings and uses across the centuries.

In Sinaloa, for example, it is possible to document three different kind of rubber ballgame: *ulama de brazo* (arm ballgame), *ulama de cadera* (hip ballgame) and *ulama de palo* (stick ballgame) (LEYNAAR 2001:122) Recently a new interest on the ballgame has spread thanks to researchers of the Nacional Autonomous University of Mexico, in order to preserve the ancestral practice and to consider it as World Heritage. The Mexican university has also started a championship among the students, while other competitions already existed in many areas of Mexico and Guatemala. The ballgame, even in modern times, is not just simply a sport or, in some cases, an attraction for tourists, but it also has a deep religious meaning and could be consider a retrieval of an ancestral tradition (PANQUEBA CIFUENTES 2015:171-172).

Ritual and religious dimension of ballgame, both in ancient and modern times, is undeniable. Indeed, it is possible to relate ballgame to sacrifice, especially through decapitation, which implies a strong relation with fertility and abundance (TALADOIRE 2017:32; TAUBE 2017:264; GARCIA – REGA 2019:38-40). From this point of view, it is possible to see a

---

<sup>1</sup> “[...]Otras veces por su pasatiempo jugaban a la pelota, y para esto teníanle sus pelotas de ulli guardadas. Estas pelotas eran tamañas como unas grandes bolas de jugar a los bolos y eran macizas, de una cierta resina o goma que se llamaba ulli, que es muy liviana y salta como pelota de viento, y tenia de ellas cargo algún paje” (SAHAGÚN 1938:297-298).

<sup>2</sup> Ulama comes from the world ullamalitzli, which was the world used in the Nahua area to describe the ballgame played by the Aztecs and other people of Mesoamerica (AGUILAR-MORENO 2015:83).

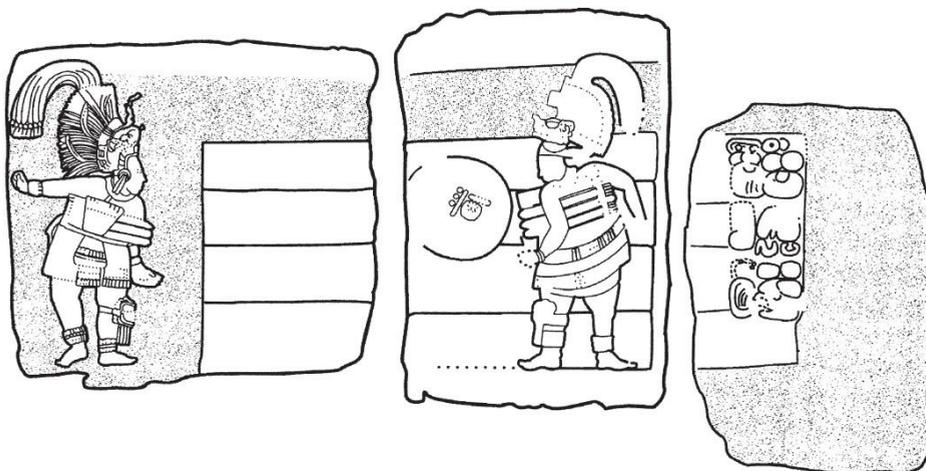
Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

strong connection with the flooding and the rain, going back to El Manatí rubber offerings in the Olmec area, which date around 1600 BC (ORTIZ et al. 2015:76; TAUBE 2018:264).

In addition to its ritual and sporty role, the ballgame was used as a vehicle to increase the power, wealth and prestige of the elite (STANLEY et al. 1991:14). This is not difficult to understand looking at various iconographic representations with elite members represented while engaging a ballgame or simply dressed as ballplayers. One of the many examples could be the so-called Element 13, from La Corona in Petén, which once was probably part of a great hieroglyphic stairway (STUART et al. 2015:9). The larger figure is the local ruler of La Corona, *Chak Ak' Paat Kuy*, playing the ballgame against a “spokesperson” of another ruler, undoubtedly *Yuhkno'm Yich'aak K'ahk'*, the contemporary king of Calakmul (ZENDER 2004:12; HELMKE et al. 2015:10).

Another panel also mentioning *Yuhkno'm Yich'aak K'ahk'* comes from Waka'-El Perú. It was found as part of a hieroglyphic stairway that leads to the Northwest Palace Complex (Figure 1). The ruler of Calakmul is represented playing the ballgame against the king of Waka' (LEE – PIEHL 2014:95-98). Both monuments, because of the presence or simply mentioning of *Yuhkno'm Yich'aak K'ahk'*, could be dated during his kingdom, which was from 686 to 695 (MARTIN – GRUBE 2008:108).



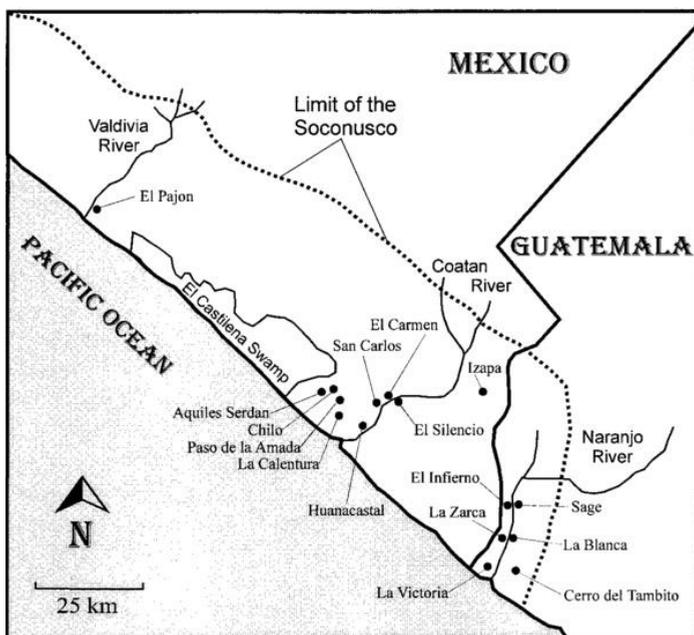
**Figure 1:** Panel from the Northern Palace Complex of Waka'. Drawing by Sarah Sage, from Lee and Piehl 2014, Figure 5.5

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

What is very interesting about the panels coming from La Corona and Waka', is the representation of the game involving a stairway. In the first case, the ball is directly bouncing on the stairs. This kind of representation is common during the Late Classic and can be seen on other panels – one interesting example comes from the site Zapote Bobal (TUNESI 2007:1) – or on many vessels documented by Justin Kerr starting from the 1989.

The presence of stairways in ballgame representation is interesting and can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of the ballcourt itself or as a different kind of game, involving a high stairway, played especially by the elites to express war events or political relations in general (MILLER – HOUSTON 1987; CHINCHILLA 1992; HELMKE et al. 2015).



**Figure 2:** Map of the Mazatan region, Mexico, showing the location of Paso de la Amada. Map from Rosenwig 2000, Figure 1.

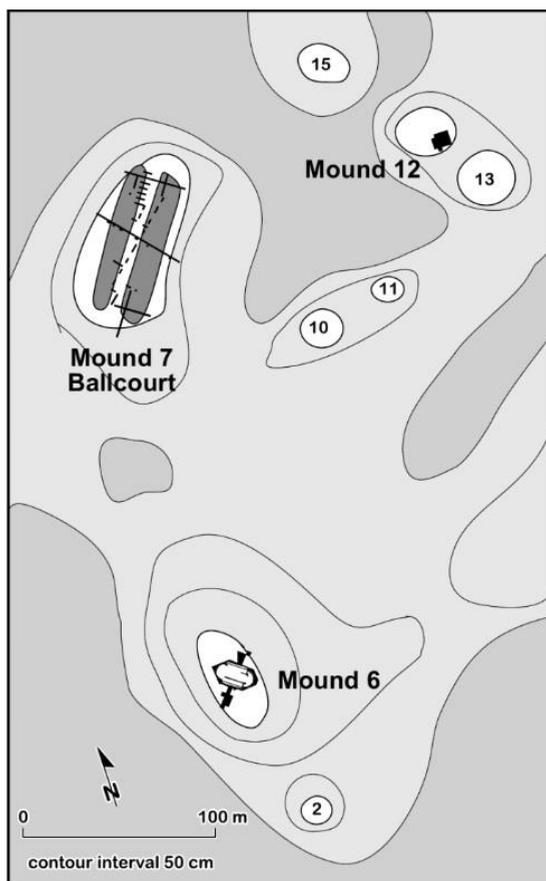
### Political and Social Dimension

The ballgame's popularity across the centuries proves that it involved not just elite groups, but a larger part of the population. It is proved that, in some cases, ballgames were related to

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

festivities which possibly brought small communities together with opportunities of connection or trade (STOLL – ANDERSON 2017:220). In addition, the material and iconographic evidence indicates that ballgames were connected to the external and internal socio-political relationships of elites and their ability to consolidate political power through ritual performance (MILLER 2001:87; FASH – FASH 2015:42).



**Figure 3:** Map of Paso de la Amada showing the excavations of 1995 in the ballcourt (Mound 7) and the Mound 6. Map from Blake et al. 2006, Figure 7.2.

The idea of competitive dimension of ballgame, and its relation to the emergence of complex societies, was developed by Warren Hill, starting from his analysis of ballcourts development in the Mazatán region in Chiapas, Mexico (Figure 2) (HILL 1999). In this area, during

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

---

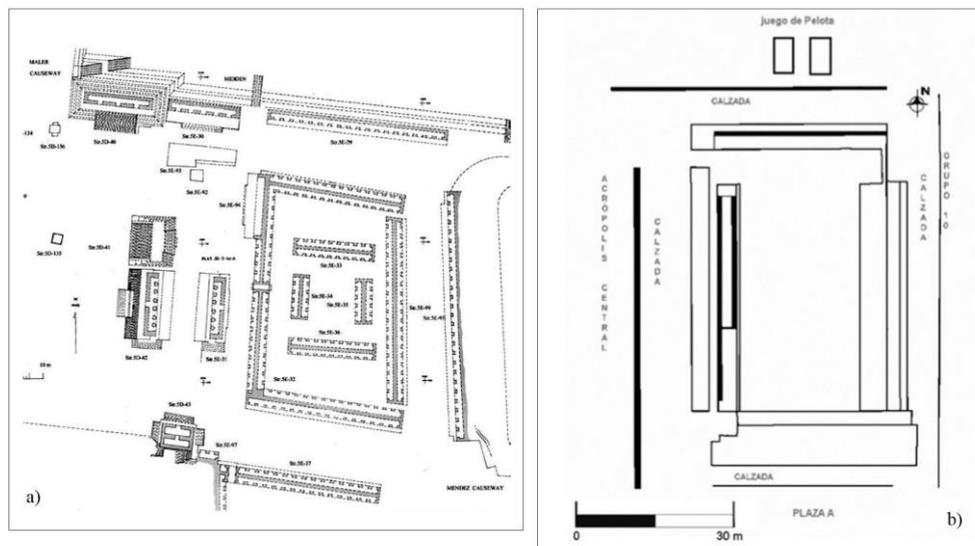
excavations conducted first in 1990 and then in 1995, was possible to reconstruct the chronology of a ballcourt in Paso de la Amada (Figure 3). According to the radiocarbon analysis, the first occupation of the area can be put around 1850 BC, while the first permanent construction started in 1650 BC (HILL 1999:78-100). In fact, this makes the ballcourt in Paso de la Amada the most ancient known so far. The author also tries to relate the presence of competitive games with the emergence of local political power. The excavations started in 1990 also interested the area of the so-called Mound 6, south of the ballcourt, confirming that this should be an élite residence, built in the same chronological sequence of the ballcourt (HILL 1999:74-78). This could lead to the idea of the élite sponsorship related to the beginning of the permanent construction of ballcourts starting from the Early Preclassic (HILL 1999:7).

The permanent construction of ballcourts in a specific territory could be a key to understand its political evolution. Competitive games and sports in general are a way to maintain and hide inequalities in a society (GRUNEAU 1975; McLANCY 1996:4-5) and to create boundaries inside and outside the community (ZAMORA 2017:48-49; TALADOIRE 2017:14). The construction of ballcourts is part of elite sponsorship, which reinforces the idea of social connection of ballgame, confirmed by different kind of sources. First, the ballcourt position in the urban scheme of a city, usually in connection with large plazas and important ways of connection, could reveal the participation of a high number of people to the game. It is possible to imagine this crowd of people and the noise of the game, looking at some scene represented on vessels dating during the Late Classic, which depict people watching the game and musicians. Archaeological evidences sometimes confirm the presence of social events connected to the game, which implies the presence of feasts, revealed by smashed vessels or discarded shells and bones found during the excavations (ZENDER 2004:10).

Excavations in the ballcourt in the site La Trinidad de Nosotros (MORIARTY – FOIAS 2007), in Central Petén, documented the existence of feasting confirmed by ceramic and chemical analysis.

The authors compare the contest found in Trinidad de Nosotros with other similar situations found elsewhere. For example, John Fox asserted that, after excavations conducted in PACO 15 and other ballcourts in the Cuyumapa Drainage area, in Honduras, it was possible to confirm the presence of elements connected to feasts in the immediate vicinity of ballcourts (FOX 1996:481). A similar situation was documented in one of the ballcourts excavated in Cancuen, in the Petexbatun region, specifically the so-called Juego de Pelota Norte (TORRES 2010:103-105).

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

**Figure 4:** a) Map of Tikal Market in the East Plaza. (Jones 2015, Figure 2.1), b) Map of La Puente Market (Mejía and Valle 2010, Figure 11).

In general, the connection between ballgame and festival activities is also confirmed by iconographic representation on vessels (ZENDER 2004) and by the relation of ballcourts with marketplace and commerce in general (BECKER 2015). One example could be in Tikal, where the market in the East Plaza is in close relation with a ballcourt (BECKER 2015:101-104; JONES 2015:85-87) (Figure 4a). Other examples are small centres in central Petén, such as La Puente, Ixtutz or Pueblito. At La Puente, for example, the area interpreted as market is very close to important routes and to a ballcourt on the north side, while the excavations revealed platforms very similar to those of the Tikal's market (MEJÍA – GENDRY 2010:597-598) (Figure 4b). In Pueblito, the market area is associated with important groups such as the Plaza C – the so-called *Plaza de las Estrellas* – a ballcourt on the north side and the Plaza B, characterized by the presence of palaces. On the east and west sides, there are important routes, all in an area of 80 m from north to south and 70 m from east to west (LAPORTE – CHOCÓN 2008:698).

Thanks to this great importance from religious, social and political point of view, ballgame can be considered as an indicator for the emergence of the first Mesoamerican states (CLARK

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

---

2007:30). The ballgame was used since the Preclassic Period as an instrument to resolve internal tensions inside a community and a way to express power (TALADOIRE 2017:34).

As Timothy Earle pointed out, there are three kinds of power: economic, military and ideological (EARLE 1997). The last one is at the base of human thought and is possible to reinforce it through rituals and erection of monument. The construction of ballcourts can be part of this mechanism, as an attempt to manipulate and impose an ideology. So, the proliferation of ballcourt can be an attempt to maintain social and political order (HILL 1999:23).

An example is the one proposed by Annick Daneels for Central Veracruz. During the later Classic Period (500-1000 AD) the population was at its high point and organized in four-level of hierarchy. At the same time, she identifies two models of socio-political systems, one centralized and the other segmentary. In the first model, the ballcourt was placed in the capital; in the segmentary model, the second-rank settlements were distributed in all the territory, each one with its own ballcourt and surrounded by tertiary centres (DANEELS 2008:197).

Daneels also notes that during the Early Classic (100-300 AD) or Middle Classic (300-700 AD), a new architectural layout appears. It consists of a pyramid on the north side of a plaza, a ballcourt on the south side and elongated platforms on east and west sides (DANEELS 2008:201).

According to studies conducted by Olivier de Montmollin in the Grijalva basin in Chiapas, Mexico (DE MONTMOLLIN 1997), which then inspired the analysis of regional distribution of ballcourts in Palenque hinterland (LIENDO STUARDO – LÓPEZ BRAVO 2006; LIENDO STUARDO 2015), the presence of ballcourts in various sites can reflect a decentralized and competitive political organization in these territories. The ballgame becomes part of a political and symbolic strategy used by elite groups.

### **A Regional Perspective**

Studies of ballgame from a regional perspective started with John Fox. In the Cuyumapa Drainage, Honduras, the construction and dedication of ballcourts can be documented extensively in the archaeological evidences. The remains of these activities are the buildings themselves, including the remains of plaster floors, stone monuments, such stelas or markers, in addition to the material remains of dedicatory activities, as caches or burials (FOX 1996:485). He also noted the closeness of ballcourts to area with domestic ceramic, which

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

---

indicated the insertion of the ballgame in contest of competitive games among various cities and festive events, especially related with the exchange of food.

In sum, this isolated position of ballcourts outside the main centre, may be an indicator of the segmentation of power inside a region during some specific periods, with the use of ballgame as a way to maintain the social cohesion, implying also pilgrimages from one site to another, but also a way to delimit territorial boundaries (STOLL 2017:62).

Few years later, in 1997, Olivier de Montmollin analysed the regional distribution of ballcourts in the Grijalva Basin, in Chiapas, Mexico, during Late/Terminal Classic, in a regional settlement and political context, focusing on sizes, forms, alignment and position of ballcourts. According to him, variations in the distribution and number of ballcourts may indicate the importance of this kind of complex for the élite both form ritual and political point of view and segmentation of elite power in different groups which used their own ballcourt as an emblem of power (DE MONTMOLLIN 1997:29-30).

Another study that uses the ballgame as an archaeological evidence to understand the political organization of a territory was conducted by Rodrigo Liendo Stuardo in the region of Palenque, Chiapas. Again, the presence of ballcourts in various sites can reflect a competitive political organization in this territory (LIENDO STUARDO 2015:150-151).

Ballcourts are collective spaces in a Maya city and their political importance is testified by being a social identifier which creates a shared social identity; the ballcourt, as the plaza, is a place of relations and collective participation and can be considered as an historical marker (LIENDO STUARDO 2015:137).

Excavations in Palenque hinterland revealed at least 12 sites with ballcourts at 6-8 km intervals (LIENDO STUARDO 2015:139), which confirmed a decentralization of power during the Late Classic, with sites of different rank according to the presence, position and characteristics of ballcourts.

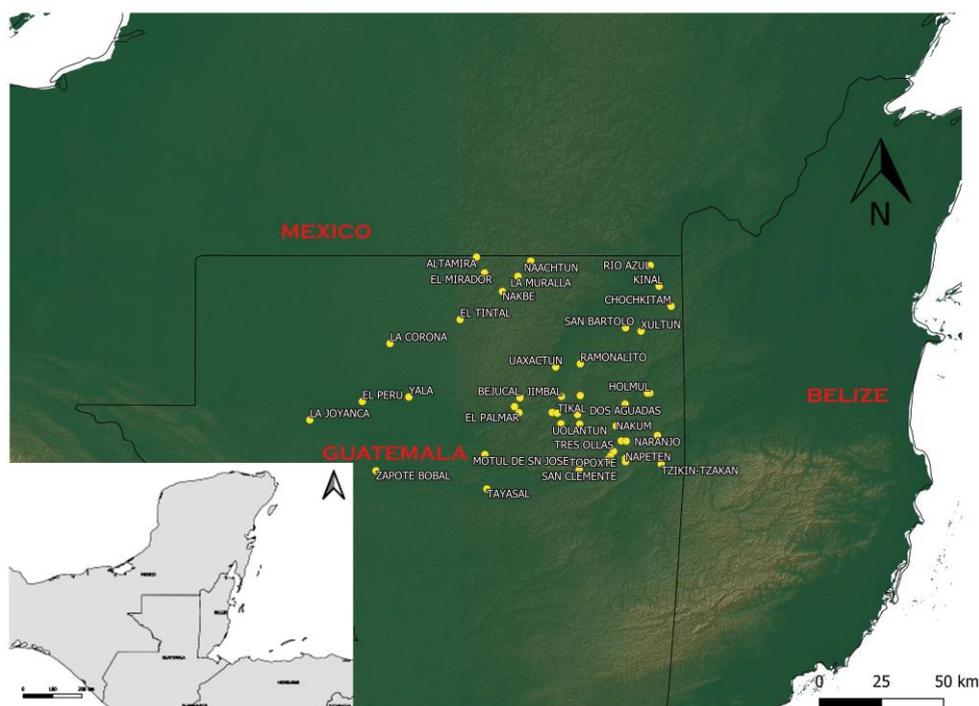
Thanks to comparisons with different areas where the analysis of regional distribution of ballcourts was used, it is possible to recognize two historical moments when the ballcourt construction spreads on a regional level, involving small sites beyond the main cities. This development can be verified in a period such as the Late Preclassic (300 BC-250 AD) or the Terminal Classic (800-900 AD), periods of tumultuous political climate and possible segmentation of power, when new kinds of political relations were born and the ballgame was one of the maximum expression of the Maya ideology (MOODIE 2012:8).

For example, between Middle and Late Preclassic there was a great development of Maya

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

groups in Northwest of Yucatán Peninsula; at moment to build their cities, this groups gave a great importance to ballcourts. The *Proyecto Costa Maya* (Maya Coast Project) subjected this area to an intensive archaeological survey (ROBLES CASTELLANO – ANDREWS 2003). The project documented the existence of over 250 sites with extensive Preclassic occupation (ANDERSON 2005:13). During three field seasons, 25 structures were identified as possible ballcourts (ANDERSON 2005:15).



**Figure 5:** Petén map. GIS elaboration by author.

In general, the ceramics collected during the excavations belongs to the Middle Preclassic; probably some of these ballcourts were settled during the Late Preclassic and archaeologists also found sporadic Early Classic sherds during the excavations (ANDERSON 2005:15).

It looks like, during the Middle Preclassic, each site had its own ballcourt, even the small cities. It is possible that the dimensions of the structures can determine the different range of the cities. One example is Xtobó, a site that presents huge dimensions in building and

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

---

*sacbeobs*<sup>3</sup> that connected directly to the ballcourt, positioned on the south side of a Triadic Group. After Xtobó, there are sites of lower range, until the fourth range sites which were without any ballcourt. Except from Xtobó, the other Preclassic ballcourts found in the region are in very small sites (ANDERSON 2009:8).

During the Preclassic Period, there is a large distribution of ballcourts inside different territories, usually in small sites and along the regional boundaries. We can also find examples of isolated ballcourts (KOWALESKI et al. 1991; FOX 1996). By the end of the Late Preclassic and the beginning of the Early Classic, there is a major concentration of ballcourts in the main sites.

This can also lead to a different meaning of the ballgame. During the Preclassic, ballgame was used as a social connector for the population, while with the beginning of the Classic Period it turned into a ritual of State mostly related to the elite power.

In general, there is a loss of interest in the use of ballcourts during the Early Classic Period, maybe due to a possible different ballgame developed with the influence of Teotihuacán in the Maya area, documentable even before the so-called *Entrada*<sup>4</sup> of 378 AD.

At the end of the Early Classic (550-600 AD), there is a new interest in the construction of ballcourts that continues throughout the Late Classic and until the Postclassic; most part of ballcourts in the main cities of the Maya Lowlands dates during this period (TALADOIRE 2017:30).

Outside the Maya area, for example in the Nejapa valley, in Oaxaca, Marijke Stoll examined the distribution of ballcourts across the landscape in order to assess the socio-political role of the ballgame in Nejapa at a regional scale (STOLL – ANDERSON 2017:226). This area

---

<sup>3</sup> The Maya causeway is called *sacbé* from the Yucatec *sac* (white) and *beh* (road). The plural form is *sacbeo'ob* (Historical Dictionary of Mesoamerica 2012:273).

<sup>4</sup> The term *Entrada* is used to refer to a specific episode happened in the date 11 Eb of the Maya history, which correspond to the year 378 AD, reported on various monuments – among others, Tikal Stela 31 and Uaxactún Stelas 5 and 22 (STUART 2000; KOVÁČ – BARROIS 2012; BELIAEV et al. 2013). This episode refers to a political figure called *Sihyaj K'ahk'*, who 'oversaw' the replacement of the rulers in cities such as Tikal and Uaxactún, with new rulers related with Teotihuacán. After the analysis of various texts, many scholars – first Tatiana Proskouriakoff and, among others, David Stuart – interpreted this episode as a military conquest by Teotihuacán. The *Entrada* can be considered as a definitive imposition of Teotihuacán in the Maya area, which influenced many other cities – including Copán, in Honduras, and Kaminaljuyú, on the Pacific Coast of Guatemala – which can be proved also by the adoption of architectural styles inspired by Teotihuacán.

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

---

shows a continuity in the occupation from the Middle Preclassic to the Late Classic, with a peak in the Postclassic Period (STOLL 2017:60). Most of the ballcourts were found in sites that can be dated during the Postclassic, based on ceramic analysis and radiocarbon dates (STOLL – ANDERSON 2017:226). Numerous social, political, economic, and geographic factors determined the presence or absence of ballcourts inside a city across time and space. Stoll found that the Nejapa ballcourts were located at sites that vary in size, complexity, and elevation. The spatial analysis demonstrates that ballcourts were built in large urban centres, small towns, and even isolated locations (STOLL – ANDERSON 2017:226). If these sites with or without ballcourt have the same chronology, it is possible to suggest that the isolated ballcourts may have served as pilgrimage sites for people coming from different communities in the vicinity (STOLL – ANDERSON 2017:227).

### **Northeast of Petén**

After this general premise about the political and social meaning of ballgame and the importance of the regional analysis of ballcourts, the attention can move to the Petén region, specifically on Northeast Petén (Figure 5).

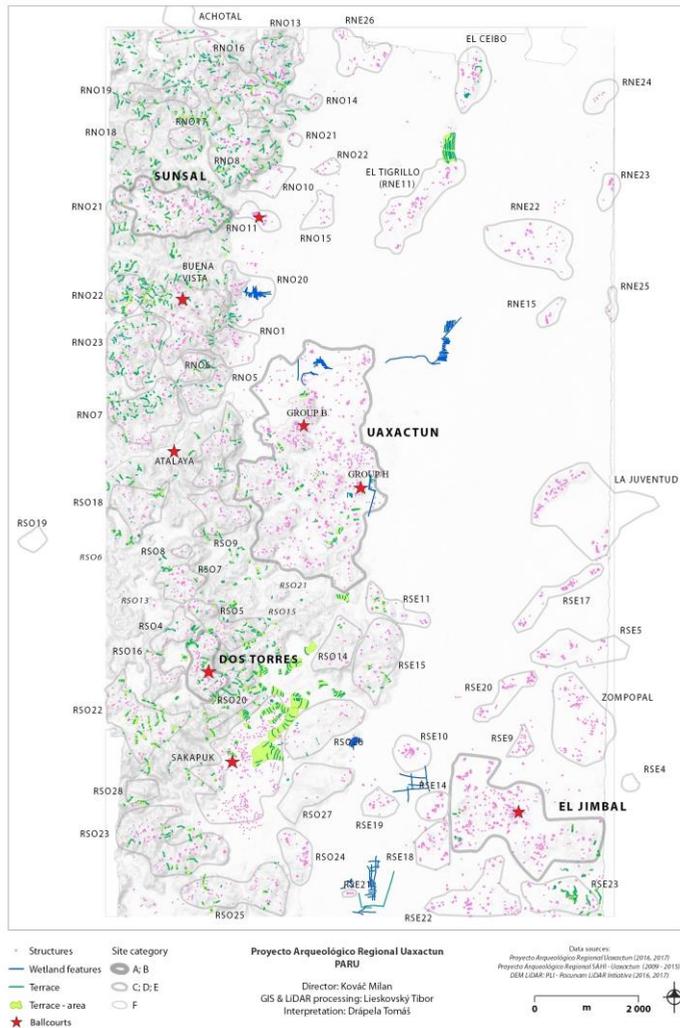
The area was chosen due to the high number of project active in the last decades; great part of the area was also investigated with the recent LiDAR technology, which allowed to get more data from the high number of structures covered by the rainforest (CANUTO et al. 2018).

In 2016, especially, in the Uaxactún territory, the use of LiDAR confirmed the presence of structures, investigated through excavations during the months of July and August of 2017 (REGA 2019). The excavations confirmed the presence of new ballcourts in three satellite sites, Buena Vista/El Chival, Atalaya and Sakapuk, adding new data to information already know on ballcourts in Uaxactún and other sites in the surrounding territory, such as Dos Torres or Jimbal (Figure 6).

Excavations revealed that the great part of these ballcourts was constructed during the Late Preclassic Period and this is documented in Uaxactún itself (Group H; Figure 7a), Dos Torres, El Chival, Atalaya and Sakapuk.

These sites are mostly located on a distance which varies from 2 to 10 km, on the top of relatively high hills, and for sure belonged to the political organization of Uaxactún.

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

**Figure 6:** Map of the Uaxactun territory by Tibor Lieskovský and Tomáš Drápela. Modified by author with the location of ballcourts.

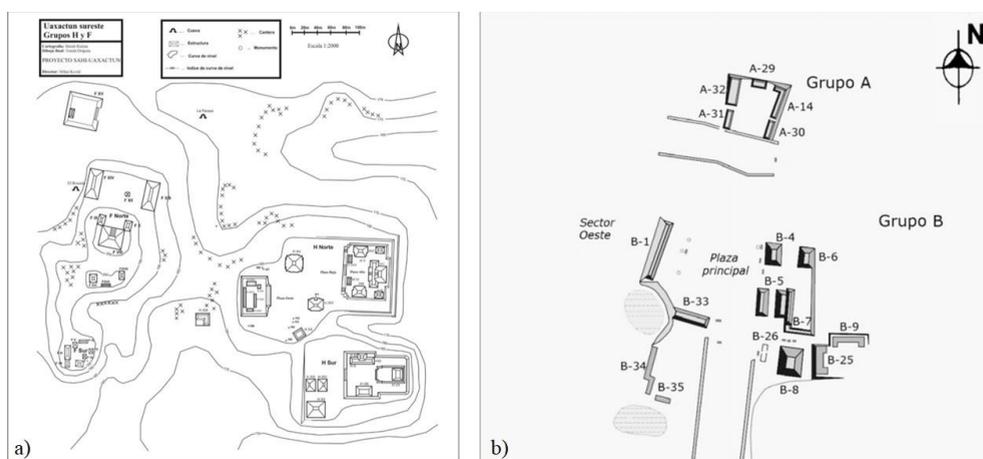
During the Late Preclassic, there was a great development of the Uaxactun satellite sites, which built their own ballcourts. As for other regions, the main idea of this large interest for

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

ballcourts could be an indicator of the relative independence of the satellite sites during this period and, in general, a less centralized power in the Uaxactún region.

By the end of the Late Preclassic, many scholars documented a period of crisis in the Central Lowlands, probably related to the fall of the great city El Mirador. El Mirador crisis involved other cities in the Maya Lowlands where there was evidence of abandonment between 150 and 250 AD, as in Uaxactún (KOVÁČ 2011) or evidences of destruction of buildings and construction of defensive structures, as in Tikal (COE 1990).



**Figure 7:** a) *Map of Uaxactun Group H south by Matúš Riečan and Tomáš Drápela; map of Uaxactun Group B by Renaldo Acevedo.*

After this moment of crisis, many cities were re-occupied with the beginning of the Early Classic; for example, in Uaxactún, there are evidence of a reoccupation of the “old city” before the movement of the population to the new urban centre (KOVÁČ 2011:53-54).

Anyway, there seems to be still lack of interest for the use of some complexes during these first centuries of the Classic Period, especially ballcourts.

In Uaxactún, for example, apart from the Preclassic ballcourt in the Group H, the ballcourt in the Group B was built directly during the Late Classic (BARROIS – JAU 2009:49) (Figure 7b), or, in the case of the satellite site El Chival, the construction corresponds to the Terminal Classic (REGA 2019:103). Several scholars related this apparent lack of interest to the Teotihuacán intervention in the Maya Lowlands (TALADOIRE 2017:29-30), a hypothesis justified by the apparent absence of a ballcourt in Teotihuacán. This idea should be discarded

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

---

after recent excavations in the so-called *Ciudadela*, in the southeast part of the city. Thanks to these excavations it was proposed that one of the structures – the Structure 5 – could be interpreted as a ballcourt, built during the so-called phase *Tzacualli* (100-150 AD) (GÓMEZ – GAZZOLA 2015:127). The hypothesis is reinforced by the materials found during the excavations which also include 13 rubber balls (GAZZOLA – GÓMEZ 2017:84-85).

The contact with Teotihuacán and the so-called *Entrada* in 378, anyway, had a great impact on the Maya area. The “New Order” imposed by Teotihuacán, in Uaxactún probably meant a high concentration of population in the main centre with a higher control. On the other hand, the ancient and well defensible sites of the surrounding mountains were abandoned; perhaps, it is possible to consider this abandonment as an evidence of some sort of *pax teotihuacana* (KOVÁČ et al. 2019:696). They served only sporadically as strategic points, more in the second half of the Early Classic, in case of wars or as elite shelters during turbulent times (MARTIN – GRUBE 2008:38).

The interest in ballgame, probably did not vanished totally, as we can see from the presence of a monument found during the excavations in El Chival (REGA 2019:97). The central marker found during the excavations of the local ballcourt, even if part of the Terminal Classic phase, was for sure carved in Uaxactún in the 5th century AD, according to iconography and palaeography (BELIAEV – TOKOVININE 2019:236-240; KOVÁČ et al. 2019:695). However, even if this monument could be interpreted also as an altar, the glyph B9 for the ballcourt itself confirms that this is for sure the ballcourt marker (KOVÁČ et al. 2019:698). This proves the existence of an interest in ballgame during the Early Classic in Uaxactún, even if there is no evidence of ballcourts dating in this period.

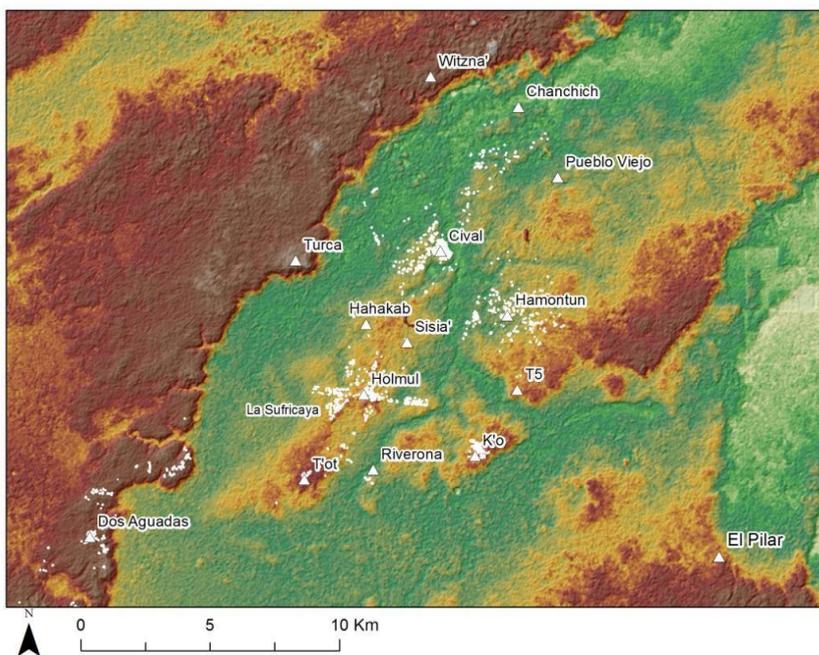
By the end of the Late Classic and the beginning of the Terminal Classic, in all the old satellite sites, a new population appears with a new constructive activity or re-occupation of previous complexes. On the other hand, it is evident that the power of Uaxactún became weaker and this led to the same regional pattern of the Late Preclassic, but with a division of power between satellite sites without central coordination. Among these, Dos Torres predominates in the south and El Chival/Buena Vista in the north. The antiquity of both sites is part of the ideology of the new elites to justify their right to power; but probably the main reason for this re-occupation is the defendable position of the two centres, due a great change in the social and political situation (KOVÁČ et al. 2019:697).

The use of this kind of analysis in the rest of Petén region is still at its beginning but it is already possible to see other example of this spread of construction of ballcourts at regional level, especially during the Late Preclassic or in the Late/Terminal Classic.

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

In the Holmul region, for example, the situation is very similar to what revealed in the Uaxactún territory. During the excavations inside the ballcourt in the so-called Group II, in the Holmul city centre, archaeologists found the central marker; even if the marker is eroded, its style can be dated in the Late Classic (ESTRADA-BELLI 2002:108). The latest excavations documented the existence of many Preclassic ballcourts, for example in Cival (BAUER et al. 2005:65), Chanchich (ESTRADA-BELLI 2015:16), T'ot (ESTRADA-BELLI 2015:19) and K'o (ESTRADA-BELLI 2005:10). Ballcourt in Dos Aguadas could had a first phase during the Late Preclassic and a possible second one during the Classic Period (ALVAREZ 2012:170) (Figure 8).



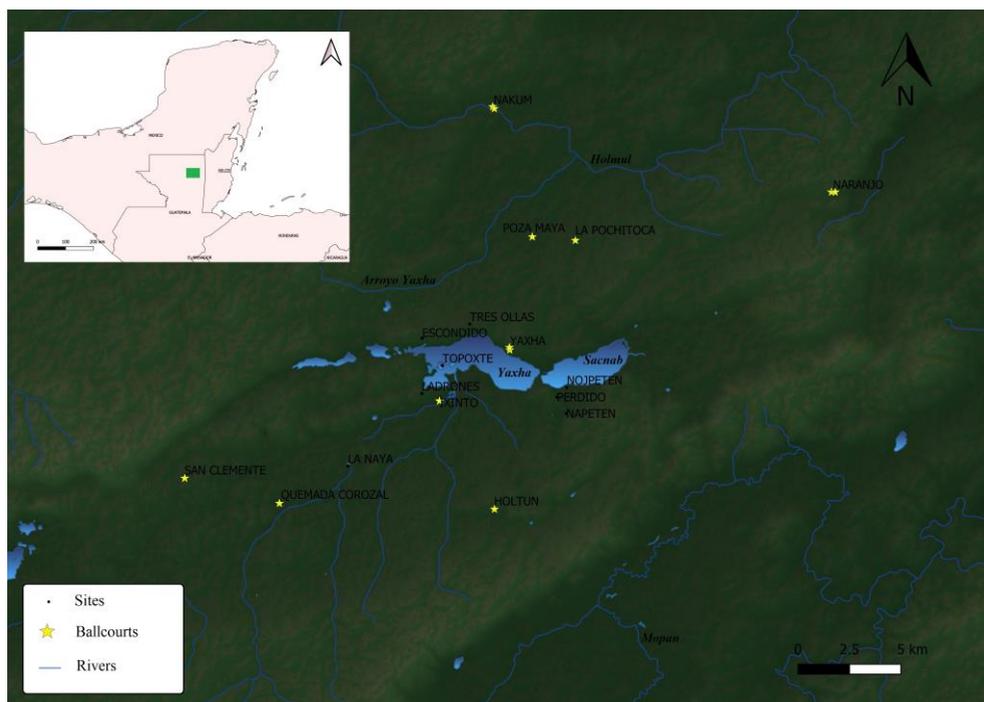
**Figure 8:** *Map of the Holmul region.* Map by Estrada-Belli 2015, Figure 1.1; topographic data by NASA, ASTER program.

Interesting is the situation in La Sufricaya which ballcourt, thanks to the excavations, can be dated during the Early Classic Period, with an abandonment shortly after the construction. Its chronology can be related to the rest of the Group I where the ballcourt was built, which is around 350-450 AD (TOKOVININE 2005:17).

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

The emergence of the local elites in satellite site can be documented in other regions during the Late Classic. In Yaxha hinterland, for example, during the Late Classic, the emergence of ballcourts in the intermediate centres reflect the type of relationship that occurred between the minor elites of the different centres and between them and the central power of Yaxha, which could reflect socio-political connection (FIALKO 2013:277) (Figure 9).



**Figure 9:** Map of Yaxha area with the principal sites and the distribution of ballcourts. GIS elaboration by author.

In Yaxha itself, the two ballcourts were built during the Late Classic Period, one on the north side of the Acropolis South, and the other one on the east of an E-Group, in a pattern that reminds Tikal ballcourts, the first in the Great Plaza, on the north side of Central Acropolis and the triple ballcourts in relation with the so-called Lost World, which follow the pattern of an E-Group (GÓMEZ 2007:512).

During the Late Classic, most of Yaxha satellite sites built their own ballcourt, which could reflect some socio-political independence from the main centre (FIALKO 2013:278). The ballcourts in Quemada Corozal and Ixtinto were built in relation to an E-Group (MORALES

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

---

2005:96), while other sites such as Poza Maya and La Pochitoca had their own ballcourt without any E-Group in the urban scheme.

The intermediate centres of La Naya and El Venado, lacking their own ballcourts, probably were at a direct dependence from the central power of Yaxha. The minor elites of San Clemente, La Quemada and Holtún with their own courts could have already had dynastic links with Yaxha (FIALKO 2013:278). On the other hand, in La Quemada, the elite importance is also confirmed by the burial practices, together with the erection of stelas in the main plazas and sculptures (MORALES 2005:108). It has been proposed by Vilma Fialko that the construction of ballcourts in the secondary rank sites can be in part related to the elite of Yaxha, even if it can be also the result of their independence. It is possible to propose that the presence of some of these sites with their own ballcourts, such as La Pochitoca and Poza Maya, in area of inter-site with Naranjo, could determine some political boundaries in the area of influence of the two cities. This bellicose relation with Naranjo is also verified in the texts on monuments dating in the 7th and 8th centuries. For example, stelas 21, 22 and 23 of Naranjo indicate that during this period Naranjo attacked several satellite sites of Yaxha, and there were probably at least two direct attacks against the city of Yaxha (MARTIN – GRUBE 2008:76-77); these attacks could refer specifically to the sites La Pochitoca and Poza Maya (FIALKO 2013:278).

## Discussion

To recapitulate, the compared analysis of Uaxactún and Yaxha territories, it is interesting to understand the role that the ballgame had in their political organization.

The analyses in the Yaxha territory, as also proposed by Vilma Fialko, proved that ballcourts were built in sites at the borders of the Yaxha territorial influence and, in some cases, at the frontier with Naranjo and Nakum territory; as said, this could also be proved by the epigraphic analysis of stelas from Naranjo.

In the Uaxactún area, the ballcourts were built in the satellite sites that border the west part of the territory. The sites seem all in hill area, at a distance that varies from 2 to 10 km from Uaxactún centre. Excavations in the past years proved that the majority of the ballcourts where in use during the Late Preclassic, while the analysis of material from other ballcourts mapped in the territory, coming from the latest excavations, are still ongoing.

The presence of ballcourts dating in the Terminal Classic is very important. As shown in El Chival ballcourt, the presence of a monument carved in Uaxactún during the Early Classic,

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

---

could be the evidence of the emergence of a local power, which used an element of the old Uaxactún dynasty; a gesture that could be interpreted as a legitimation of power in a turbulent period (KOVÁČ et al. 2019:696). The re-use and relocation of ancient monuments is common in the ancient times and usually happened in moment of political instability, military conquest and new political alliances, as seen in many cities of the Central Lowlands by the end of the Late Preclassic and the beginning of the Early Classic (LOWE 2012:194).

The construction or reoccupation of a ballcourt during a turbulent time such as the Terminal Classic, can be indicative of the great political and cultural importance of ballgame, even in troubled times. An interesting example comes from Nohmul, in Belize. The proposed chronology for this ballcourt is around 800 AD, in a moment of great cultural changes and influence from the Northern Lowlands (HAMMOND et al. 1987:278-279; HAMMOND 1991:56-57).

This is just one example of the continuity in the building activity during a turbulent time, as we can see in cities as Yaxhá itself, or Nakum, which confirmed a high renovation programme in the centre of the city and in its periphery in the years between 850-950 AD (ŽRAĽKA – HERMES 2012:171-175).

It is possible to propose that, even in a moment of great cultural and political changing such as the Terminal Classic, the presence of a ballcourt was still considered an important element in the urban organization, used by the local elite to express its prestige and power.

## **Conclusion**

The analysis of the regional distribution of ballcourts in the Northeast of Petén, revealed that each analysed territory is unique, but it is possible to see common patterns in different cities and their relationship with the hinterland.

In Uaxactún territory, the distribution of ballcourts in the satellite sites, reveals the changes in the political organization across the centuries. Comparing Uaxactún with other areas with a high number of ballcourts in small sites during the Late Preclassic, it is possible to propose for this area a fragmentation of the elite power, as proposed by Anderson for the Northwest of Yucatán Peninsula and Fox for Cuyumapa Drainage.

By the end of the Late Preclassic and the beginning of the Early Classic, all these regions showed a low interest in the construction of ballcourts. In Uaxactún, this can be related to the moment of crisis that involved many cities in the Maya Lowland and culminated with the

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

---

strong Teotihuacán influence on the Maya area. This influence could lead to a political centralization, with the abandonment of the satellite sites and the moving of Uaxactún population in the new urban centre. The interest in the construction of ballcourts will not happen again until the Late Classic, with the construction of the ballcourt in the Group B.

The Late Classic in general, saw the highest interest in the construction of ballcourts, as we can see also in Tikal and Yaxha. The appearance of ballcourts in the intermediate site in Yaxha region, some of them in the inter-site area with Naranjo and Nakum, can be explained with the emergence of locale elites related to the main centre.

With the lack of central power during the Terminal Classic, a new fragmentation of power occurred, as it is possible to see with the emergence of El Chival in Uaxactún territory.

The existence of ballcourts in isolated position or at the territorial borders, reveals the social role that ballgame had in all Mesoamerica across the centuries, and not just during the Preclassic Period. As Hill pointed out for the Mazatán region, and Stoll and Anderson confirmed for Oaxaca and Northwest of Yucatán, the primary role of ballgames was for community-building. This social importance can be confirmed by archaeological evidence indicating feasts in close connection with ballcourts, confirming the participation of a high number of people which can be perceived also thanks to representations on vessels.

In conclusion, with the increase of data for this kind of analysis and the production of catalogues and GIS-based maps, it will be possible to better understand the regional distribution of ballcourts in the Northeast of Petén and to help reconstruct the changes in the political and social use of ballgame in this area across the centuries.

## Bibliography

AGUILAR, Miguel (2003): The Ballgame as a portal to the Underworld. In *The PARI Journal*, Vol. III, n. 2, pp. 4-9.

AGUILAR-MORENO, Miguel (2015): *Ulama*: pasado, presente y futuro del juego de pelota mesoamericano. In *Anales de Antropología* Vol. 49-1, pp. 73-112.

ALVAREZ, Brenda (2012): Capítulo 13. DAG.L.05. y DAG.T.10, Juego de Pelota. In Francisco Estrada-Belli (ed.): *Investigaciones arqueológicas en la región de Holmul, Petén: Holmul y Dos Aguadas. Informe Preliminar de la Temporada 2012*. Boston: Boston University, Archaeological Department, pp. 167-175.

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

---

ANDERSON, David (2005): Preclassic Settlement Patterns in Northwest Yucatán. In *Mono y Conejo* 3, pp. 13-34.

ANDERSON, David – MEDINA CASTILLO, Edgar (2017): El juego de pelota en el Noroeste de Yucatán. In *Arqueología Mexicana* 146, pp. 35-39, México.

BARROIS, Ramzy (2006): *Les Sculptures Associées aux Jeux de Balle dans l'Aire Méso-Américaine*. Thèse pour obtenir le grade de Docteur de l'Université Paris I es archéologie et anthropologie. Paris: Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, U.F.R. Histoire de l'Art et Archéologie.

BARROIS, Ramzy – JAU, Cruz (2009): Capítulo I. Investigación y restauración en el Juego de pelota. (Operación 1). In Milan Kováč, Ernesto Arredondo Leiva (eds): *Nuevas Excavaciones en Uaxactun I. Temporada 2009*. Bratislava – Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción: SAHI, pp. 15-51.

BAUER, Jeremy – FEIJTA, Dessa – SPECTOR, Zac (2005): Investigaciones preliminares de un juego de pelota preclásico en Cival, Petén, Guatemala. In Francisco Estrada-Belli (ed.): *Investigaciones en la región de Holmul, 2005. Informe preliminar de la temporada 2005*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University, pp. 65-78.

BECKER, Marshall J. (2015): Ancient Maya Markets. Architectural Grammar and Market Identifications. In Eleanor M. King (ed.): *The Ancient Maya Marketplace: The Archaeology of Transient Space*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, pp. 90-110.

BELIAEV, Dmitri – TOKOVININE, Alexandre – VEPRETSKIY, Sergei – LUIN, Camilo (2013): Los monumentos de Tikal. In Dmitri Beliaev and Mónica de León (eds.): *Proyecto Atlas epigráfico de Petén. Fase I. Informe Final No.1. Temporada abril-mayo 2013*. Guatemala: Instituto de Antropología e Historia, pp. 37-170.

BELIAEV, Dmitri – TOKOVININE, Alexandre (2019): Capítulo XVIII. Análisis epigráfico del marcador de El Chival/Buena Vista. In Milan Kováč, Sandra Ventura, Dora García (eds.): *Nuevas excavaciones en Uaxactun IX. Temporada 2017*. Bratislava: Center for Mesoamerican Studies (CMS) Comenius University – Chronos, pp. 236-240.

BLAKE, Michael – Lesure, Richard G. – HILL, Warren D. – BARBA, Luis – CLARK, John C. (2006): The Residence of Power at Paso de la Amada, Mexico. In Jessica J. Christie, Patricia J. Sarro (eds.): *Palaces in the Americas. From Perú to Northwest Coast*. Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 191-210.

CHICHILLA MAZARIEGOS, Oswaldo (1992): El juego de pelota en la escritura y el arte maya clásico. Interpretaciones recientes. In Maria Teresa Uriarte (ed.): *El juego de pelota mesoamericano. Temas eternos, nuevas aproximaciones*. México: Dirección General de Publicaciones y Fomento Editorial, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, pp. 67-93.

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

---

COE, William R. (1990): *Excavations in the Great Plaza, North Terrace and North Acropolis of Tikal. Tikal Report No. 14*. Philadelphia: The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania.

COLAS, Pierre R. – VOSS, Alexander (2006): A Game of Life and Death – the Maya Ballgame. In Nikolai Grube (ed.): *Maya: Divine Kings of the Rainforest*. Cologne: Könemann, pp. 186-191.

DANEELS, Annick (2008): Ballcourts and Politics in the Lower Cotaxtla Valley: a Model to Understand Classic Central Veracruz? In Arnold III, Philip J., Christopher A. Pool (eds.): *Classic Period Cultural Currents in Southern and Central Veracruz*. Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Other Titles in Pre-Columbian Studies, Harvard University Press, pp. 197-223.

DANEELS, Annick (2016): *Juego de pelota y política. Un estudio sobre cómo se desarrolló la sociedad del Periodo Clásico en el centro de Veracruz*. México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

DE MONTMOLLIN, Olivier (1997): A Regional Study of Classic Maya Ball Courts from the Upper Grijalva Basin, Chiapas, Mexico. In *Ancient Mesoamerica* 8, pp. 23-41.

EARLE, Timothy (1997): *How Chiefs Come to Power: The Political Economy in Prehistory*. Stanfrod: Stanford University Press.

ESTRADA-BELLI, Francisco (2002): Anatomía de una ciudad: Holmul. Resultados de nuevas investigaciones arqueológicas en 2000 y 2001. In *Mexicon*, Vol. XXIV, pp. 107-112.

ESTRADA-BELLI, Francisco (2015): Resumen de las investigaciones de la temporada 2015. In Francisco Estrada-Belli (ed.): *Investigaciones arqueológicas en la región de Holmul, Petén: Holmul y Cival. Informe preliminar de la temporada 2015*. New Orleans: Tulane University, pp. 2-28.

FASH, Barbara – FASH, William (2007): The Roles of Ballgames in Mesoamerican Ritual Economy. In E. Christian, Karla Davis-Salazar (eds.): *Mesoamerican Ritual Economy: Archaeological and Ethnological Perspectives*. Boulder: University of Colorado Press, pp. 267-283.

FASH, William – FASH, Barbara (2015): Apuesta, guerra ritual e identidad en el juego de pelota en Mesoamerica. In Maria Teresa Uriarte (ed.): *El juego de pelota mesoamericano. Temas eternos, nuevas aproximaciones*. México: Dirección General de Publicaciones y Fomento Editorial, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, pp. 39-66.

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

---

FOX, John Gerard (1996): *Playing with Power: Ballcourts and Political Ritual in Southern Mesoamerica*. In *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 37, n. 3, pp. 483-509.

GARCIA PATZÁN, Dora Maritza – REGA, Maria Felicia (2019): *The Decapitation Ritual and the Ancient Maya Ballgame. From Archaeological Evidences to Sacred Stories*. In *Axis Mundi* 13 (1), pp. 30-41.

GAZZOLA, Julie – GÓMEZ CHÁVEZ, Sergio (2017): *Nuevos datos sobre el juego de pelota en Teotihuacan*. In *Arqueología Mexicana* 25 (146), pp. 82-85.

GÓMEZ, Oswaldo (2007): *Proyecto Plaza de los Siete Templos de Tikal: Los edificios del sur de la plaza*. In Juan Pedro Laporte, Bárbara Arroyo, Hector Mejía (eds): *XX Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas en Guatemala, 2006*. Guatemala: Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología, pp. 492-518.

GÓMEZ CHÁVEZ, Sergio – GAZZOLA, Julie (2015): *Una posible cancha de juego de pelota en el área de la Ciudadela, Teotihuacan*. In Annick Daneels (ed.): *Anales de Antropología* 49-I, pp. 113-133.

GRUNEAU, Richard S. (1975): *Sport, Social Differentiation, and Social Inequality*. In Donald W. Ball, John W. Loy (eds.): *Sport and Social Order. Reading: Contributions to the Sociology of Sport*. Boston: Addison-Wesley.

HAMMOND, Normann (1991): *The Ball Court at Nohmul, Belize*. In Gerard W. van Bussel, Paul L. F. van Dongen, Ted J. J. Leyenaar (eds.): *The Mesoamerican Ballgame*. Leiden: Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, pp. 43-57.

HAMMOND, Normann – DONAGHEY, Sara – GLEASON, Colleen – STANEKO, J. C. – VAN TUERENHOU, Dirk – KOSAKOWSKY, Laura (1987): *Excavations at Nohmul, Belize, 1985*. In *Journal of Field Archaeology* 14 (3), pp. 257-281.

HILLS, Warren (1999): *Ballcourts, Competitive Games and the Emergence of a Complex Society*. Thesis to obtain the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Department of Anthropology and Sociology. Vancouver: The University of British Columbia.

HELMKE, Christophe – ANDRES, Christopher R. – MORTON, Shawn G. – WROBEL, Gabriel D. (2015): *For Love of the Game: The Ballplayer Panels of Tipan Chen Uitz in Light of Late Classic Athletic Hegemony*. In *The PARI Journal*, Vol. XVI (2), pp. 1-30.

JONES, Christopher (2015): *The Marketplace at Tikal*. In Eleanor M. King (ed.): *The Ancient Maya Marketplace: The Archaeology of Transient Space*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, pp. 67-89.

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

---

KIRCHHOFF, Paul (1966 [1943]): Mesoamerica: Its Geographic Limits, Ethnic Composition and Cultural Characteristics. Translated by Norman A. McQuown. In *Ancient Mesoamerica: Selected Readings*, Palo Alto: Peek Publications, pp. 1-14.

KOVÁČ, Milan (2011): Hiatus en el fin de Preclásico y retorno de los reyes, Uaxactun, Guatemala. In *Contributions in New World Archaeology* 3, pp. 49-63.

KOVÁČ, Milan – BARROIS, Ramzy (2012): El papel de Siyaj K'ahk' en Uaxactun y el Petén Central. In Jarosław Żrałka and Wiesław Koszkul (eds.): *Contributions in New World Archaeology, vol. 4, Maya Political Relations and Strategies, Proceedings of the 14th European Maya Conference*. Krakow: Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, Jagiellonian University, Institute of Archaeology, pp. 113-126.

KOVÁČ, Milan – BELIAEV, Dmitri – TOKOVININE, Alexandre – REGA, Maria Felicia – DÍAZ GARCÍA, Maurizio – MÉNDEZ, Diana (2019): Relevancia de las canchas de juego de pelota alrededor de Uaxactun. Una interpretación sociopolítica y epigráfica. In Bárbara Arroyo, Luis Méndez Salinas, Gloria Ajú Álvarez (eds.): *XXXII Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas en Guatemala*. Guatemala: Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, Instituto de Antropología e Historia pp. 693-704.

LAPORTE, Juan Pedro – CHOCÓN Jorge E. (2008): ¿Será un Palacio?... ¡No! ¿Será una Acrópolis?... ¡No!: Un conjunto de función desconcertante en el centro de Pueblito, Petén. In Juan Pedro Laporte, Bárbara Arroyo, Hector Mejía (eds.): *XXI Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas en Guatemala, 2007*. Guatemala: Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, IDAEH, Asociación Tikal. pp. 696-712.

LEE, David F. – PIEHL, Jennifer C. (2014): Ritual and Remembrance at the Northwest Palace Complex, El Perú- Waka'. In Olivia C. Navarro-Farr, Michelle Rich (eds.): *Archaeology at El Perú-Waka'*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, pp. 85-101.

LEYNAAR, Ted J. J. (2001): The Modern Ballgames of Sinaloa: a Survival of the Aztec Ullamalitzli. In E. Michael Whittington (ed.): *The Sport of Life and Death: The Mesoamerican Ballgame*. New York: Thames and Hudson, pp. 122-128.

LIENDO STUARDO, Rodrigo (2015): Canchas de Juego de Pelota en la Región de Palenque, Chiapas. Representación y Política. In *Anales de Antropología*, Vol. 49-1, pp. 135-15.

LIENDO STUARDO, Rodrigo – LÓPEZ BRAVO, Roberto (2006): Organización política y funciones sociales vistas a través de los patios para el Juego de Pelota del señorío de Palenque. In Juan Pedro Laporte, Barbara Arroyo and Hector Mejía (eds.): *XIX Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas en Guatemala, 2005*. Guatemala: Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología, pp. 431-440.

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

---

MARTIN, Simon – GRUBE, Nikolai (2008): *Chronicle of Maya Kings and Queens*. New York: Thames and Hudson.

McCLANCEY, Jeremy (1996): *Sport, Identity and Ethnicity*. Oxford: Berg Press.

MEJÍA, Héctor E. – VALLE, Gendry R. (2010): Exploraciones en el Área Central de La Puente, Dolores, y la determinación de otro conjunto de mercado en la zona. In Bárbara Arroyo, Adriana Linares, Lorena Paiz (eds.): *XXIII Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas en Guatemala, 2009*. Guatemala: Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología, pp. 595-608.

MILLER, Mary Ellen (2001): The Maya Ballgame: Rebirth in the Court of Life and Death. In E. Michael Whittington (ed.): *The Sport of Life and Death: The Mesoamerican Ballgame*. New York: Thames and Hudson, pp. 78-87.

MILLER, Mary Ellen – HOUSTON, Stephen (1987): The Classic Maya Ballgame and Its Architectural Settings. A Study of Relations between Text and Image. In *RES* (14), pp. 47-65.

MOODIE, Stephen J. Morgan (2012): Excavations at the Minanha Ballcourt, North Vaca Plateau, Belize. Paper presented at the 77th Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology (SAA), April 18-April 21, 2012. Memphis: Tennessee.

MORIARTY, Matthew D. – FOIAS, Antonia E. (2007): El juego de poder en el centro de Petén: Evidencia cerámica sobre festejos asociados al Juego de Pelota en La Trinidad de Nosotros. In Juan Pedro Laporte, Bárbara Arroyo, Hector Mejía (eds.): *XX Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas en Guatemala, 2006*. Guatemala: Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología, pp. 1397-1415.

ORTIZ, Ponciano – RODRIGUEZ, María del Carmen – DELGADO, Alfredo – URIARTE, María Teresa (2015): Las ofrendas en El Manatí y su posible asociación con el juego de pelota: un yugo a destiempo. In Maria Teresa Uriarte (ed.): *El juego de pelota mesoamericano. Temas eternos, nuevas aproximaciones*. México: Dirección General de Publicaciones y Fomento Editorial, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, pp. 67-93.

PANQUEBA CIFUENTES, Jairzinho F. (2015): Espiritualidades mayas en los juegos de pelota de antebrazo y cadera en el siglo XXI. Pok-Ta-Pok en México, Chaaj y Chajchaay en Guatemala. In *El Futuro del Pasado* (6), pp. 159-173.

REGA, Maria Felicia (2019): Capítulo VIII. Excavaciones en los grupos satelitales – Buena Vista, Oper. 38 A. In Milan Kováč, Sandra Ventura, Dora García (eds.): *Nuevas excavaciones en Uaxactun IX. Temporada 2017*. Bratislava: Center for Mesoamerican Studies (CMS) Comenius University – Chronos, pp. 92-103.

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

---

ROBLES CASTELLANO, Fernando – ANDREWS, Anthony (2003): *Proyecto Costa Maya: Reporte interino, Temporada 2002: Reconocimiento arqueológico de la esquina noroeste de la península de Yucatan*. Mérida: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Centro INAH Yucatán.

SAHAGUN, Fray Bernardino de (1938): *Historia General de las cosas de Nueva España. Tomo II*. Mexico D.F: Editorial Pedro Robredo.

SCHELE, Linda – FREIDEL, David (1991): The Courts of Creation: Ballcourts, Ballgame and Portals to the Maya Otherworld. In Vernon L. Scarborough and David R. Wilcox (eds.): *The Mesoamerican Ballgame*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, pp. 289-315.

SCHELE, Linda – MILLER, Mary Ellen (1986): *The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art*. New York: George Braziller Inc.

STOLL, Marijke M. (2017): Los Juegos de Pelota y las relaciones comunitarias en Oaxaca y la Sierra Sur. In *Arqueología Mexicana* 25 (146), pp. 58-63.

STOLL, Marijke M. – ANDERSON, David S. (2017): Sport and Ritual as Social Bonding. The Communal Nature of Mesoamerican Ballgames. In Barbara Voorhies (ed.): *Prehistoric Games of North American Indians: Subarctic to Mesoamerica*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, pp. 219-234.

STUART, David (2000): The 'Arrival of Strangers': Teotihuacan and Tollan in Classic Maya History. In David Carrasco, Lindsay Jones, Scott Sessions (eds.): *Mesoamerica's Classic Heritage: From Teotihuacan to the Aztecs*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, pp. 465-514.

TALADOIRE, Eric (1981): *Les terrains de Jeu de Balle. Mésoamérique et Sud-ouest des États-Unis*. Mexico: Centre of Mexican and Central American studies.

TALADOIRE, Eric. (2001): The Architectural Background of Pre-Hispanic Ballgame: an Evolutionary Perspective. In E. Michael Whittington (ed.): *The Sport of Life and Death. The Mesoamerican Ballgame*. New York: Thames and Hudson, pp. 96-115.

TALADOIRE, Eric. (2017): Los juegos de pelota en Mesoamérica. In *Arqueología Mexicana* 25 (146), pp. 27-34.

TAUBE, Karl (2017): The Ballgame, Boxing and Ritual Blood Sport in Ancient Mesoamerica. In Colin Renfrew, Iain Morley, Michael Boyd (eds): *The Ritual in the Game, the Game in the Ritual – Part III*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 264-301.

TOKOVININE, Alexandre (2005): Excavaciones en el juego de pelota en La Sufricaya (Estructuras 48 y 49). In Francisco Estrada-Belli (ed.): *Investigaciones en la región de*

Maria Felicia REGA

**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

---

Holmul, 2005. *Informe preliminar de la temporada 2005*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University, pp. 193-217.

TORRES, Paola (2010): Canchas como instrumentos de interacción política, económica y social en el Mundo Maya de Mesoamérica. In Bárbara Arroyo, Andrea Linares y Lorena Paiz (eds.): *XXIII Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas en Guatemala, 2009*. Guatemala: Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología, pp. 99-110.

TUNESI, Raphael (2007): A New Monument Mentioning Wamaw K'awii of Calakmul. In *The PARI Journal* 8 (2), pp. 1-9.

VELASQUEZ GARCIA, Eric (2016): The Ballgame: confluence between the Human and the Divine. In Alejandra Martínez de Velasco Cortina, María Elena Vega Villalobos (eds.): *The Maya. Voices in Stone*. Nashville: Turner, pp. 267-280.

WITSCHHEY, Walter R. T. – BROWN, Clifford, T. (2012): *Historical Dictionary of Mesoamerica*. The Scarecrow Press, Inc. Lanham. Toronto. Plymouth, UK.

ZAMORA RIVERA, Monica (2017): Los Juegos de Pelota en Cantona, Puebla. In *Arqueología Mexicana* 25 (146), pp. 46-51.

ZENDER, Marc (2004): Sport, Spectacle and Political Theater: New Views of the Classic Maya Ballgame. In *The PARI Journal* 4 (4), pp. 1-12.

ŻRAŁKA, Jarosław – HERMES, Bernanrd (2012): Great Development in Troubled Times: the Terminal Classic at the Maya site of Nakum, Petén, Guatemala. In *Ancient Mesoamerica* (23), pp. 161-187.

**Maria Felicia Rega** (1988) is an archaeologist and PhD candidate at Sapienza University of Rome and Comenius University in Bratislava. She gets her master's degree in 2016 with a thesis about ancient topography and urbanism of the Maya area. Her PhD project is now focused on the urban and regional distribution of ballcourts in Northeast Petén, Guatemala, especially in the Uaxactun territory, thanks to the collaboration with the Uaxactun Archaeological Project in Petén. Her previous publications include a co-authorship with Dora García, *The Decapitation Ritual and the Ancient Mayan Ballgame. From Archaeological Evidence to Sacred Stories* (2019), on the journal *Axis Mundi*, and a co-authorship with Milan Kováč, Dmitri Beliaev, Alexandre Tokovinine, Mauricio Díaz García and Diana Méndez, *Relevancia de las canchas de juego de pelota alrededor de Uaxactun. Una interpretación sociopolítica y epigráfica* (2019), in *XXXII Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas en Guatemala 2018*.

