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**POSITION OF WOMAN IN THE MAYA WORLD
DURING THE CLASSIC PERIOD (AD 250-900)***

The dissertation, based on the epigraphic, iconographic and archaeological data, focuses on the prominent role played by women in the Maya society during the Classic period. As the Maya hieroglyphic inscriptions and stone monuments were commissioned by kings, which was their privilege, the subject of my work concentrates on the elite women, historical personages. They are mentioned in inscriptions as mothers and wives, they used many prestigious titles and participated in different rituals. Although it was Herbert Spinden¹, who in 1913 drew our attention to depictions of women on the Maya stone monuments, broader scholarly interest in the position of Maya

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¹ H.J. Spinden, *A Study of Maya Art: Its Subject Matter and Historical Development*, *Memoirs of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology*, 6, Cambridge 1975 [1913].

women started with pioneer papers by Tatiana Proskouriakoff². Since there the topic has engaged a good deal of attention among many researchers³, in particular of Kathryn Josserand⁴; however, the information given by them was limited to several kingdoms only (especially Yaxchilan and Calakmul) or was relatively general, and therefore, quite a number of problems have not been explained. Thus, I concluded that undertaking a much deeper and more detailed analysis in my dissertation may serve to understand better the role played by noblewomen in the religious, social and political life of the ancient Maya.

The ancient Maya inhabited the region of about 324 000 square kilometres, now belonging to five Mexican states (Tabasco, Chiapas, Campeche, Yucatan and Quintana Roo), Guatemala, Belize and western parts of Honduras and El Salvador. The history of the Maya civilization can be divided into three basic periods: Preclassic (2000 BC-AD 250), Classic (AD 250-900) and Postclassic (AD 900-1500). It is during the Classic period that increasing development of the Maya writing system takes place, with a growing number of inscriptions carved on stone monuments, like stelae, panels, lintels, altars, hieroglyphic stairways, painted on polychrome ceramic vessels and on the interior walls of structures, or incised in small portable objects. The chronological framework of the Classic period was established on the basis of the earliest and the latest inscriptions, with the dates written using the so-called Long Count, that enable us to correlate the Maya calendar dates with the Gregorian calendar dates. Thus, the earliest date – 08.12.14.08.15 (AD 292) was carved on Stela 29 in Tikal (Petén, Guatemala), and the latest one – 10.04.00.00.00 (AD 909) – on Monument 101 in Tonina (Chiapas, Mexico). The Classic period is further subdivided into the Early Classic (AD 250-600) and the Late Classic (AD 600-900) periods. During the Late Classic period the Maya civilization reached its cultural apogee, yet the florescence of Maya

² T. Proskouriakoff, *Portraits of Women in Maya Art*, [in:] S. Houston, O. Chinchilla Mazariegos, D. Stuart (eds.), *The Decipherment of Ancient Maya Writing*, Norman 2001 [1961], pp. 342-357.

³ See: E.A. Hewitt, *What's in a name. Gender, power, and Classic Maya women rulers*, *Ancient Mesoamerica* 10, 1999, pp. 251-262; S. Martin, *The Queen of Middle Classic Tikal*, *PARI Online Publications: Newsletter* 27, 1999; K. Olsen Bruhns, K.E. Stothert, *Women in Ancient America*, Norman 1999; R.A. Joyce, *Gender and Power in Prehispanic Mesoamerica*, Austin 2000; S. Teufel, *Matrimonios diplomáticos: mujeres en la corte*, [in:] N. Grube (ed.), *Los Mayas. Una civilización milenaria*, Colonia 2001, pp. 172-173; A. García Barrios, V. Vázquez López, *The Weaving of Power: Women's Clothing and Protocol in the Seventh-Century Kingdom of Kaanu'l*, *Latin American Indian Literatures Journal* 27, 1, 2011, pp. 50-95.

⁴ K. Josserand, *Women in Classic Maya Hieroglyphic Texts*, [in:] T. Ardren (ed.), *Ancient Maya Women*, Walnut Creek 2002, pp. 114-151.

polities provoked rivalry and intensifying war conflicts, leading to failure of royal authority, collapse and abandonment of many kingdoms.

Since the beginning of the studies on the Maya civilization, understanding of the socio-political organisation of their cities in the Classic period has been causing many problems, and for many years scholars have been searching for some appropriate model of the Maya political complexity. Identification of the so-called emblem-glyphs⁵ (referring to different Maya polities) and the decipherment of the Maya writing system, let us assume that the Maya polities were more or less independent kingdoms, some of them with large spheres of influence, as was the case of Tikal and Calakmul, two greatest military powers⁶.

Since the Maya world was dominated by males and inscriptions were a kind of political propaganda, that related events in their lives, one may expect women to be mentioned only sporadically. However, in the Maya society noblewomen played quite prominent roles and in the corpus of hieroglyphic inscriptions there are hundreds of texts referring to females. The importance of the Maya noblewomen can be seen in parentage statements. When analysing genealogies of the Maya kings, I gathered 160 mentions of more than 100 different women called mothers, using one of some literal or metaphorical expressions “he (is) a son of (the mother)”, and 24 texts with the phrase “she (is) the mother”. It should be noticed that more than half of these inscriptions were carved on stelae, altars and hieroglyphic stairways, that is on monuments situated in plazas, where public ceremonies were performed in front of large audiences. Moreover, with the exception of some isolated cases, mothers were mentioned ahead of fathers, which is already observed in the Early Classic period (AD 250-600). The epigraphic record also provides women’s parentage statements, which, even despite the relatively low number of only 17 examples, gives evidence that also women’s descent was significant to the Maya.

The analysis of all the titles used by the Maya elite women constitutes one of the most important parts of my research, being the first so detailed study on this topic so far. It should be emphasized, however, that among many

⁵ H. Berlin, *El glifo emblema en las inscripciones mayas*, [in:] *The Decipherment of Ancient Maya Writing*, pp. 299-306.

⁶ S. Martin, N. Grube, *Evidence for Macro-Political Organization among Classic Maya Lowland States*, Preliminary version, London-Bonn 1994; idem, *Política clásica maya dentro de una tradición mesoamericana: un modelo epigráfico de organización política hegemónica*, [in:] S. Trejo (ed.), *Modelos de entidades políticas mayas. Primer Seminario de Mesas Redondas de Palenque*, Conaculta 1988, pp. 131-146.

different titles used by the ancient Maya nobles during the Classic period, there are some that are still poorly understood. All the titles found in the females' nominal phrases have been divided by me into three categories. The first group focuses on the titles associated with social status. In case of women the most common one was the title *Ix Ajaw* ("Noble Lady"), given in inscriptions together with a toponym or the so-called emblem-glyph, which allows us to establish the place of the woman's origin. This title has been emphasized in the Maya texts since the Early Classic period. The title *K'uhul Ajaw* ("Divine Lord"), reserved for the kings, deserves a special mention. In the Maya world ruling women were very scarce and the only fully documented queen, ruling on her own, was *Ix Yohl Ik'nal* in Palenque. The prominent Mayanists, Houston and Inomata⁷ state that one more example of the *K'uhul Ajaw* title given to a woman can be found in Naranjo, in case of *Ix Wak Chan*, which, according to the authors is just an anomaly that proves the rule of lack of this title in female nominal phrases. Interestingly enough, my research demonstrates that in the Maya inscriptions 8 different women are mentioned with the *K'uhul Ajaw* title, 7 of which not being official rulers. Therefore, I have tried to find an explanation for all these examples. With the exception of *Ix Yohl Ik'nal*, 5 of the females were probably regents to their minor sons, though the title could have been honorary and conferred posthumously. In my opinion, *Ix Tz'akbu Ajaw* in Palenque and *Ix Lajuncha' Unen Mo'* in Tikal were paid such great honour. There are also 3 women with the *K'uhul Chatahn Winik* title ("Divine Person from Chatahn"), where in some kingdoms, the word *winik* ("person") was used instead of *ajaw*⁸. These women were probably associated with the sphere of influence of the Kaan kingdom.

The titles *Sajal* and *Kaloomte'* used by noblewomen, were studied previously by Sarah Jackson⁹ and Kathryn Reese-Taylor et al.¹⁰, respectively; yet I have found 3 more examples of women with the *Ix Sajal* title. The *Ix Sajal* title was related to secondary elite and is defined only to the kingdoms in the Usumacinta region. The matter of the exceptionally prestigious Maya title

⁷ S.D. Houston, T. Inomata, *The Classic Maya*, Cambridge 2009, p. 146.

⁸ E. Boot, *Continuity and change in text and image at Chichen Itza, Yucatan, Mexico*, Leiden 2005, p. 507.

⁹ S.E. Jackson, *Politics of the Maya Court. Hierarchy and Change in the Late Classic Period*, Norman 2013.

¹⁰ K. Reese-Taylor, P. Mathews, J. Guernsey, M. Fritzler, *Warrior Queens among the Classic Maya*, [in:] H. Orr, R. Koontz (eds.), *Blood and Beauty. Organized Violence in the Art and Archaeology of Mesoamerica and Central America*, Los Angeles 2009, pp. 39-72.

Kaloomte' is quite different. Reese-Taylor et al. give examples of only 6 women from 5 kingdoms, adding that with the exception of *Ix Yok'in* (from the Early Classic period), the *Kaloomte'* title was used for 25 years only. However, according to my research the *Kaloomte'* title can be found in nominal phrases of 21 different women from 14 kingdoms, and was used for the time-span of 130 years, the difference being significant. In my dissertation, for the first time, information has also been gathered on the Maya noblewomen with the titles: 1) *Baah Kab* ("First of the Earth") for 17 different women, though used only for the time-span of 100 years (AD 700-800), 2) *Ch'ok* (related to young members of royal families), used by 4 women, and 3) *Baah Ajaw* ("First Lord" – in the meaning of an outstanding person from the elite with the *ajaw* title) for 6 women, used for the short time-span, from the middle of the 7th century to the middle of the 8th century, but in different Maya polities.

The same group of titles associated with social status, also includes other, local titles related either to members of particular royal lineages or to definite geopolitical territory. Among this kind of titles, we can mention: *Nahbal K'inich* and *Chan Pet* in Tikal, *K'abte'* – in Xultun, *Sak Chuwen* – in Naranjo, *Huk Tzuk* – in the region of Naranjo, Yaxha and Tubal, or *Sak Wayis*, associated with the Kaan dynasty's influence sphere.

The second category of titles examined in the dissertation is formed by the so-called "godly titles", associated with mythological entities and being especially difficult to interpret. Beside the sporadically used "GI title" (5 examples) and the "Water Serpent title" (8 examples), the most frequent one, referring to noblewomen, is the so-called "vase title", related to Goddess O. The name of this goddess in the Classic period remains unknown, but in the Postclassic painted books (the so-called "codices") she is named *Chak Chel*. She was identified as having both, creative and destructive forces, being the patron of pregnant women and childbirth but, on the other hand, she was also associated with storms and floods, and was closely connected to rainy deities in general. Although Hull and Sheseña¹¹, not providing any detailed information or calendar dates, give 50 examples of this title being used by women from 18 kingdoms, the epigraphic record provides at least 80 examples for Maya women from 30 different polities, especially from the Usumacinta region, central Peten, Petexbatun and Belize, over the time of 400 years, from AD 475 to AD 864. The very enigmatic and difficult to interpret *Ho'*

¹¹ K. Hull, A. Sheseña, *Drenched in Tradition: A Reading for the Inverted Vase Glyph*, 2011, unpublished manuscript in possession of the author.

huun title, which can be found in 8 cases, accompanying the “vase title”, is also worthy of mention.

The third category of titles analysed on the basis of epigraphic resources refer to offices held by Maya noblewomen at the royal court in the Classic period. The title *Ajk'uhun*, considered by Mark Zender as a priestly title¹², was used by at least 10 women, who might have played different roles, like running the organization of ceremonies, taking care of the deities' images, guarding the painted books or the accessories needed for different rituals. Even though people with *Ajk'uhun* title could also be scribes, in the Maya inscriptions scribe-painters are named *Ajtz'ihb*. Although they were mostly males, some examples of women-scribes have been found, as well. Among other titles used by few Maya women we find: *Anaab*, *Chak Tok Wayab* and *Yajaw K'ahk'*. In general, it can be assumed that Maya noblewomen held offices associated with religious rituals and with an artistic activity.

A detailed analysis of inscriptions has allowed me to establish personal names of the women from particular kingdoms and the time-span for which all the titles mentioned above, even those very rare for females, were used.

The next important topic discussed in the dissertation is related to marriages of the Maya kings during the Classic period. In the Maya inscriptions, mentions of women being “wives/companions” are very infrequent, probably because the act of contracting a marriage was only the beginning of the way leading to the final goal: the birth of offspring – of the heir. In most cases the Maya kings married local women; it may be assumed that this took place in times of relative stability, when the kingdom was powerful, with no signs of a break in the dynastic line and thus, there was no need for any political alliance based on marriage with a woman from another kingdom. Certainly women descending from local, influential lineages supported the kings in their actions, but the real role played by elite women in Maya political life is reflected in interdynastic marriages. In such cases the kings' parentage statements and female titles *Ix Ajaw* (with attached toponyms or emblem-glyphs) are very helpful, as on the basis of data royal marriages between different kingdoms' members can be established. Although various authors have already highlighted the importance of marital alliances¹³, the lists of royal mar-

¹² M. Zender, A Study of Classic Maya Priesthood, Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Archaeology, University of Calgary, 2004.

¹³ See: P. Mathews, The Sculpture of Yaxchilan, Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1988, p. 371; L. Schele, P. Mathews, Royal visits and other intersite relationships among the Classic Maya, [in:] T.P. Culbert (ed.), Classic Maya Political History. Hieroglyphic and archaeological evidence,

riages given by them never exceed 25 examples, referring only to the Late Classic period (AD 600-900). My research allows me to prepare a much longer list, since I have found 52 interdynastic marriages, 10 of which are related to the Early Classic period (AD 250-600).

Interdynastic marriages provide clues to the relationships between kingdoms and have been confirmed for many Maya polities, with varying reasons behind such alliances. Sometimes the kingdoms, with their peaceful mutual relationships to each other, just wanted to seal their friendship or to consolidate their power should any military attack occur, as it is easier to resist an enemy together. In some cases marriages were a consequence of military conflicts, when noblewomen from the conquered polities were married by the victorious kings, or even by other members of the elite. Consequently, the conquered king became a vassal, and the offspring born from such an interdynastic marriage assured a solid alliance, and an additional guaranty against any possible counterattack.

The most common ones were interdynastic marriages that served to extend the sphere of influence, to maintain the already existing dominance in the region or to control trade routes. Among such marriages, the noblewomen associated with the Kaan dynasty played very significant roles. The Kaan kings were well-known for arranging interdynastic marriages, though the principles they acted on remain unclear. It is difficult to establish if the women were married by rulers from other kingdoms of their own will, to be supported by a powerful ally, or if the Kaan kings specified some conditions or gave some ultimatum.

The body of data examined permits me to state that elite women from the royal court of Tikal married the rulers from other kingdoms, as well. Such useful strategy was probably adopted by Tikal after its defeat of Calakmul in AD 695. It should also be pointed out that some political marriages should be considered from a broader perspective, since, for example, alliances between Dos Pilas and Itzan or Dos Pilas and Naranjo, mentioned by various scholars, increased the sphere of influence of the Kaan kingdom, yet not that of Dos Pilas.

I have also paid attention to infrequent marriages with a man arriving from another polity. There are few examples of such marriages but they must have played an important role in particular moments of the Maya history

Cambridge 1996, p. 243; S. Martin, N. Grube, *Cronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens*, London 2008, p. 21; A. Benavides Castillo, C. Pallan Gayol, *Mujeres del Edzná precolombino*, *Los Investigadores de la Cultura Maya* 10, I, 2010, pp. 165-166.

since we find them not only in the Early Classic period in Tikal and Copan, but also many centuries later in Chichén Itzá.

An analysis of the titles used by the Maya women allows me to show that in the Late Classic period, the difference between the members of royal families and the representatives of the secondary elite began to obliterate, as the kings *K'uhul Ajaw* married women with the *Sajal* title, while men with the *Sajal* title got married to women with the *Ajaw* title. Discussing the topic associated with marriages, I have also raised the question of polygamy. In the Maya inscriptions there is no sufficient evidence to support the hypothesis that polygamy was practised by the Maya kings. We know only a few examples of the king mentioning in texts more than one woman, which does not necessarily mean that the ruler had two wives at the same time. If he lived and reigned for a long time, it was quite possible that after the death of his first wife, he decided to get married again.

The high position of the Maya women is attested by their active participation in different rites that played an enormous role in the ancient Maya belief system. It was not only the kings but also other elite members that participated in civil and religious ceremonies, that are difficult to distinguish in case of the Maya. Undoubtedly, the bloodletting (autosacrifice) and the vision rites, during which deities and spirits of venerated ancestors were conjured, were the most important ones. For this reason, most of the scholars writing about the rites performed by Maya women¹⁴, usually mention only these two rituals, paying special attention to the monuments from Yaxchilan, though many examples can also be found in other Maya cities. My research has not been limited to putting all these examples together, but also - basing on the monuments' iconography - attempts to establish their character, whether private or public, and the way they were represented in the scenes carved on stone monuments or painted on the interior walls of structures. This study has enabled me to draw some interesting conclusions. For instance, the moment in the bloodletting rite, private in nature, when Maya women pulled ropes through the wounds in their perforated tongues, was represented only on lintels or mural paintings inside buildings, to which access was restricted and allowed only to the royal family members. Instead, on the stelae standing in public places, like plazas, we find images of women holding bowls with bloodletting implements (like stingray spine and paper spotted with blood)

¹⁴ See: L. Schele, M. Miller, *The Blood of Kings*, Fort Worth 1986; K. Josserand, *Women in Classic Maya Hieroglyphic Texts*, pp. 127-139; M. Miller, S. Martin, *Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya*, New York 2004.

as symbols of autosacrifice already performed or to be performed. In case of the conjuring rite, representations of women with the so-called “vision serpent” occur in private, controlled places, while in public spaces we find scenes with women holding in their arms ceremonial bars as a symbol of the vision rite or demonstrating their ability to communicate with entities from the Otherworld.

A detailed analysis of hieroglyphic inscriptions and iconography of monuments offers more information on other rites the Maya noblewomen participated in. The relatively frequent, though mostly for men, was the personification rite (*ubaahil a'n*), when deities were impersonated through some costume elements or attributes the men were holding. The same rite is also associated with over a dozen women, when among the impersonated deities we find Goddess O, the Moon Goddess, and the Water Serpent. Although the Maya women did not participate directly in ritual dances, they are represented as secondary participants, accompanying men, for example, displaying the so-called “sacred bundles” in the scenes depicted on the Yaxchilan lintels. According to various scholars, such “sacred bundles”, that were passed down from generation to generation, might have contained royal insignia, images of gods, jade and ritual implements or just were a symbol of the burden undertaken by the king at the moment of his accession¹⁵.

To the ancient Maya, the ends of 5, 10, 15, and especially of 20 years (the so-called *k'atun*) were very important and associated with particular rituals. Many images preserved on stone monuments from the Classic period commemorate ceremonies performed on such occasions. Although in many cases women are depicted in the company of their husbands or sons, the hieroglyphic inscriptions tell us about their active participation in the rites as protagonists, as well. Among the rituals related to Period Endings two are particularly worth mentioning, i.e.: *k'altuun* (“stone-binding”) and *tz'ap tuun* (“putting a stone into the ground”), associated with dedication of stelae and altars. Regarding the Maya women, examples of such rites performed by them, can be found for 8 different noblewomen in 6 various kingdoms. Women also parti-

¹⁵ See: T. Proskouriakoff, *Portraits of Women*, p. 352; V.R. Bricker, *A Grammar of Maya Hieroglyphs*, New Orleans 1986, p. 152; L. Schele, M. Miller, *The Blood of Kings*, p. 71; B. Stross, *The Burden of Office: A Reading*, *Mexicon* 10 (6), 1988, pp. 118-121; C. Tate, *Yaxchilan. The Design of a Maya Ceremonial City*, Austin 1992, p. 68; E. Newsome, *Trees of Paradise and Pillars of the World*, Austin 2001, p. 166; D. Stuart, *Jade and Chocolate: Bundles of wealth in Classic Maya Economics and Ritual*, [in:] J. Guernsey, F.K. Reilly III (eds.), *Sacred Bundles: Ritual acts of wrapping and binding in Mesoamerica*, Barnardsville 2006, p. 129; M. Ayala Falcón, *Bultos sagrados de los ancestros entre los mayas*, *Arqueología Mexicana* XVIII, 106, 2010, p. 34.

cipated in the scattering rite (*chok ch'aa*) – a symbolic act of sowing, where the scattered material could be incense, blood or maize seeds. All Period Ending ceremonies were probably performed in the presence of a broad audience, and thereafter they were represented on stelae raised in the main plazas.

Thanks to my epigraphic analysis, I have also been able to find some examples of expressions like *ukabijj* (“under his/her auspices”), *yichnal* (“in his/her presence”) and *yila'* (“he/she witnessed it”) used in relation to women. This is of special importance because in the Maya world supervision or witnessing of ceremonies were reserved only for kings, or even for gods. Then such data provide good evidence of high social status of Maya women and of their prestige. Although these mentions are relatively few, they can be found in different Maya kingdoms, both in the Usumacinta region and Peten, and in the north of Yucatan. Interestingly enough, the examples mentioned above are not always related to women whose powerful position has been documented on the basis of other texts.

In the subsequent part of my dissertation I focus on gathering and discussing female images carved and painted on the Maya monuments. Like the inscriptions, that served the kings' glorification, the depictions carved on stone monuments were also restricted to members of royal families, and only in the Late Classic period other elite people were represented, too. In the Maya culture images constituted a kind of mediation between the depicted person and the rest of the community, and they might have been even more important than accompanying texts¹⁶. It was the king who decided in which place stelae, panels or lintels should be displayed and who would be depicted on them. Therefore, the scenes on monuments represent only the people that were especially significant to particular kings. Since, in the scenes saved on various media, images of women can also be found, I examine different female images one after another, starting with mothers who were depicted in various manners, depending on kingdoms. For instance, in Palenque they accompanied their sons at the moment of accession to office or they were represented as ancestors, resurrecting after the death as fruit trees. In Yaxchilan mothers were depicted inside lunar cartouches, and in Tikal – on the lateral sides of stelae. Mothers were also represented assisting their sons during many rituals.

¹⁶ S.D. Houston, *Depictions of the Built Environment*, [in:] idem (ed.), *Function and Meaning in Classic Maya Architecture*, Washington 1998, pp. 341-343.

On stone-carved monuments, portraits of the kings' wives can be found, as well. Images of royal couples were usually represented on paired stelae, with one of them depicting the female, and the other – the male in such a way that they seemed to look at one another, constituting just one composition¹⁷. Royal couples were also represented on the same stela, with the ruler on its front and his wife on its back, or both of them being depicted together on the frontal side of the stelae. There are at least 28 examples of portraits of royal couples. We also find images of females accompanying their husbands during many ceremonies, though such scenes come mostly from the polities in the Usumacinta region.

However, special attention should be paid to all the monuments representing women alone, as the protagonists of the scenes, which provide evidence of their high prestige, as such honour was usually accessible only to kings. There are about 50 female images of this kind, and adding all the paired stelae, we get about 80 examples from 40 various kingdoms. Certainly, in comparison with the rulers' portraits, these numbers are not very impressive but in almost all cases these noblewomen appear on our right, with their bodies frontally and with their heads turned to our left, which, according to the set of conventions in the Maya iconography¹⁸, emphasized the females' preferred position and their high social status. In some cases, the scenes carved on stelae represent noblewomen as warriors, standing atop of captives, symbolizing supreme domination, though active participation of the Maya women in warfare remains an open question. In addition to women documented in inscriptions as kings' mothers or wives, there are also various depictions of other women, appearing in the company of rulers or secondary elite members.

Most of the female portraits (about 2/3) are preserved on the stelae displayed in public plazas, and only a dozen of examples are found on the lintels inside private buildings. While some images date back to the Early Classic period, an increasing number of women' images can be noted in the Late Classic period, reaching the maximum during the time-span of AD 650-800.

A study of the monuments' iconography offers an opportunity to examine female attires. In the Maya world, as in other Mesoamerican cultures, clothes

¹⁷ J. Marcus, *The Inscriptions of Calakmul. Royal Marriage at a Maya City in Campeche*, University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology, Technical Report 21, Ann Arbor 1987.

¹⁸ J. Palka, *Left/Right Symbolism and the Body in Ancient Maya Iconography and Culture*, *Latin American Antiquity* 13, 4, 2002, pp. 419-443.

reflected social status¹⁹, thus the costumes of noblewomen looked very rich and were exceptionally ornate. The most typical female garment was cotton *huipil*, that looked like a long tunic, sleeveless and loose-fitting, being a rectangular unit of textile, with a central hole for the head. *Huipils* could be white or one-coloured, decorated with subtle, horizontal and vertical borders, often not only woven, but also embroidered or painted. In some cases they were made of especially fine textiles like gauze or adorned with jade beads, pearls, shell plaques and fringes. The costume made of jade beads in the net pattern deserves special attention. According to various authors, this attire could have been associated with women personifying the Moon Goddess or the female aspect of the Maize God, or the Earth's Surface from which a new ruler is born like the Maize God²⁰. Considering different decorative motifs adorning *huipils*, it is not possible to determine if they were strictly related to particular rites as rituals were not always independent of each other. What may be stated with certainty is that all rites performed by Maya noblewomen required a long, elegant *huipil* or a net dress of jade beads.

The importance of elite women in the ancient Maya society did not come to the end at the moment of their death because the cult of ancestors was deeply rooted in the Maya culture²¹. In the hieroglyphic inscriptions from the Classic period we find about 18 mentions of women's deaths. Despite this relatively low number, they should be emphasized since, even in case of the most powerful Maya rulers, their death dates remain unknown and can be determined only approximately, taking into account the date of the next king's accession. The women's high social status was also reflected in grave offerings, not only considered as luxurious, but hiding deep symbolism, as well. During archaeological excavations in the Maya land, many rich female burials were discovered, e.g.: at Caracol, Copan, El Peru-Waka', Palenque or

¹⁹ P.R. Anawalt, *Indian Clothing before Cortés*, Norman-London, 1981.

²⁰ See: K. Taube, *The Major Gods of Ancient Yucatan*, *Studies in Pre-Columbian Art & Archaeology* 32, 1992, p. 68; M. Quenon, G. Le Fort, *Rebirth and Resurrection in Maize God Iconography*, [in:] J. Kerr (ed.), *The Maya Vase Book*, 5, New York 1997, pp. 884-902; R.A. Joyce, *Gender and Power in Prehispanic Mesoamerica*, Austin 2000, pp. 81-83; K. Bassie-Sweet, *Corn Deities and the Male/Female Principle*, [in:] L.S. Gustafson, A.M. Trevelyan (eds.), *Ancient Maya Gender Identity and Relations*, Westport 2002, pp. 107-125; C. Tate, *Yaxchilan*, pp. 303-305; M.G.Looper, *Women – Men (and Men – Women): Classic Maya Rulers and the Third Gender*, [in:] *Ancient Maya Women*, pp. 182-183; J. Nehammer Knub, S. Thun, Ch. Helmke, *The Divine Rites of Kings: An Analysis of Classic Maya Impersonation Statements*, *Acta Mesoamericana*, 20, Markt Schwaben 2009, pp. 177-195; E.M. Puga Salazar, *Ix Kab. La mujer y el simbolismo terrestre en el arte maya*, *Investigadores de la Cultura Maya* 19, I, 2010, p. 191.

²¹ P.A. McAnany, *Living with the Ancestors. Kinship and Kingship in Ancient Maya Society*, Austin 1995.

Yaxchilan²², though sometimes we are not able to identify the interred women with certainty. The Maya cult of dead ancestors can also be seen in special funerary rites, like specific body treatments (e.g. dressing, painting or wrapping) or ritual censing of tombs, even many years after the person's death²³. We find such examples also for elite women, who, like the major Maya kings, joined the circle of venerated ancestors. Moreover, the buildings hiding important, also female tombs inside, with the passage of time became very important from religious and ceremonial points of view.

None of the topics discussed in my dissertation constitutes a closed chapter and can be an object for further studies on the Maya women. During archaeological excavations in many ancient Maya sites, monumental sculptures with carved hieroglyphic inscriptions are still being discovered, enabling us to get more and more information on the Maya history. Furthermore, using modern technology, many previously unknown Maya cities are located and added to the archaeological map of the Maya region. Our knowledge on the Maya women, their titles, rituals performed by them or their political marriages will be surely enriched with new data. Nevertheless this dissertation may be a good starting point for future research on the ground of the copious exemplary material that I have been able to gather and analyze.

²² See: E.E. Bell et al., Tombs and Burials within the Early Classic Copan Acropolis, [in:] idem, M.A. Canuto, R.J. Sharer (eds.), *Understanding Early Classic Copan*, Philadelphia 2004, pp. 131-158; D.Z. Chase, A.F. Chase, *The Architectural Context of Caches, Burials, and Other Ritual Activities for the Classic Period Maya (as Reflected at Caracol, Belize)*, [in:] S.D. Houston (ed.), *Function and Meaning in Classic Maya Architecture*, pp. 299-332; R. García Moll, *Shield Jaguar and Structure 23 at Yaxchilán*, [in:] M. Miller, S. Martin, *Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya*, pp. 268-270; A. González Cruz, *La reina roja. Una tumba real de Palenque*, INAH-Conaculta 2011; O. Navarro Farr, G. Pérez, D. Menéndez, *Operación WK-1: Excavaciones en la Estructura M13-1*, [in:] J.C. Pérez Calderón (ed.), *Proyecto Regional Arqueológico El Peru-Waka'. Informe 10. Temporada 2012*, Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción 2013, pp. 3-91.

²³ J.L. Fitzsimmons, *Death and the Classic Maya Kings*, Austin 2009.

