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Ixchel and Cotton Cloth Production in Classic Period Northern Yucatan

Traci Ardren

Woven cotton mantles constituted one of the most important trade and tribute items produced during Classic Maya times. The northern Yucatan peninsula is a perfect environment for cotton cultivation and Maya women of the area have a long and illustrious textile tradition. From this same area come native depictions of weavers and their supernatural patron, the goddess IxChel. These depictions, or native codices, contain a wealth of information about how weavers ensured the protection of their goddess through offerings of cotton and cloth. Archaeological evidence from the northern Maya lowlands, especially along the Caribbean coast provides data on the temples and artifacts associated with these offerings. This paper will examine the role the Weaving Goddess played in the manufacture of cotton cloth in Yucatan as demonstrated in both archaeological and iconographic data from the Classic Maya period. It will also examine evidence for the native weaving industry in the northern lowlands and suggest a model for the gendered production of household wealth during Classic times.

Traci Ardren is Co-Director of the Chunchucmil Regional Economy Project, an archaeological investigation into the Classic Maya trade center of Chunchucmil, Yucatan. She received her PhD from Yale University in 1997 and has worked in the Maya area since 1986. Much of her research involves the symbolic aspects of architectural design and the artistic representation of gender dynamics. Traci began weaving in high school and collects Maya textiles. She is thrilled to present new work on ancient textile production.