Scope and Value of Walter Morris Jr. Legacy for the Mayan Textile Studies

Alcance y valor del legado académico de Walter Morris Jr. para los estudios de los textiles mayas

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Abstract: This article analyzes the academic legacy of the late Mayanist researcher Walter F. Morris Jr. (1953-2019), who dedicated his life to the study of the Mayan costumes of Chiapas in all their variety. The objective is to examine Morris's main works in order to highlight their scope and value for continuing studies of the history and traditions of Mayan textiles.

Keywords: Walter F. Morris's Work, Mayan Textiles of the Chiapas Highlands, Textile Iconography, Pellizzi Collection, Sna Jolobil.

Resumen: Se presenta el análisis del legado académico del fallecido investigador mayista Walter F. Morris Jr. (1953-2019), quien dedicó su vida a la investigación de la vestimenta maya de Chiapas en toda la variedad de sus aspectos. El objetivo consiste en examinar sus principales trabajos con el fin de destacar su alcance y valor para los estudios sobre los textiles mayas, ya que todos ellos han permitido conocer y entender la tradición textil maya y su historia.

Palabras clave: obra de Walter F. Morris Jr., textiles mayas de los Altos de Chiapas, iconografía textil, colección Pellizzi, Sna Jolobil.

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Introduction

Traditional Mayan clothing is a subject that has attracted the attention of researchers for more than a century, in particular the textiles and designs of the clothing

of Guatemala. Much less attention has been dedicated to the Mayan textiles of Chiapas, Mexico, with the works of Marta Turok (1976), Kazayasu Ochiai (1997), and Irmgard Weitlaner (Johnson, 2015) constituting the few exceptions.

Nevertheless, systematic research on Mayan textiles from Chiapas actually began in the 1970s, mainly thanks to the efforts of Walter Francis Morris Jr., better known as Chip Morris. Winner of the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship in 1983 for his labor in cultural conservation, and author of several books on Mayan clothing, Morris was considered for more than forty years the leading specialist on Chiapas Mayan textiles. A native of the United States, he lived in Chiapas from the early 1970s on and dedicated himself to systematically describing the state's Mayan textiles, publicizing their historical, ethnographic and aesthetic value. In the process, he almost single-handedly at first created a market for them beyond Chiapas that both provided work for those who produced them, mostly women, and thereby provide for their survival.

Morris's inexhaustible interest in various aspects of the Mayan textile tradition is reflected in his extensive published works, which include 5 books, 6 book chapters, 8 articles, 5 reports, 3 flyers, 2 exhibition catalogs, as well as numerous unpublished works which he shared freely. All of his books were initially written in English, and later translated into Spanish, and all of them were reprinted several times as a result of their great success. Two of them were recognized with the prestigious awards, Ansfield-Wolf Book Award for *Living Maya* in 1988, and the Benjamin Franklin Gold Award for *Maya Threads: A Woven History of Chiapas*, written with Carol Karasik, in 2016. With this pioneering legacy, Morris opened new paths for research not only on Chiapas's Mayan textiles as physical objects, but on such disparate themes as the representation of Mayan cosmology in contemporary art, and the economics of household production in contemporary Mayan communities. Despite the recognition of his work in the United States, however, it is necessary to point out that his visionary work has not yet received the attention it deserves in Chiapas and Mexico, where on the one hand his greatest product, his comprehensive collection of Chiapas textiles from the second half of the twentieth century through the first years of the twenty-first, is not known by his name but by that of his sponsor and patron as the Pellizzi Collection, and on the other his unpublished, English works are little known.

The present essay is dedicated to the intellectual and cultural legacy left by Walter Morris after more than 40 years of research on Chiapas's Maya and their textiles. The main objective is to re-examine both his published and unpublished works in order to highlight their scope and value for future research. A further objective is to call attention to what Morris himself considered one of his most important lines of research, textile iconography. Morris was the first to carry out and present iconographic and iconological analyses of Chiapas's Mayan textile designs, modern as well as prehispanic, and most suggestively, to demonstrate their persistence through time.

Only since 2020 when his personal archive was made accessible to outsiders has it been possible to study his complete works. Although the archive is not complete,

it demonstrates the breadth of his knowledge and interests, and the unpublished material it contains both demonstrates his ongoing research and opens new themes for others.

As part of the background research for this essay, scripted but open interviews, both in person and online, were conducted with several of Morris's close friends. As it happens, an interview I conducted with Morris himself in 2015 also plays an important role. My intention is to analyze Morris's work qualitatively by combining the information from the interviews with what can be learned about his interests and methods from his own texts.

The texts themselves, published and unpublished, will be examined in chronological order. I should clarify at the outset, however, that not all of his works will be examined, but only those that I consider to be the most important and transcendent.

In order to contextualize this examination of his research, I begin with a brief biography to try to help us to locate his works in time and relating them to events in his life.

A short biography[1]

Walter F. Morris Jr. was born in Boston in 1953. He came from a religious family and began his studies at Loyola University, a private Catholic institution of the Jesuit order. After a year of classes, however, he left Loyola and enrolled in the Faculty of Letters at Columbia University in New York.

He came to Chiapas for the first time as a tourist in during his summer vacation in 1972. Determined to get closer to Mayan culture, he decided to stay with the "true Mayas", the Lacandones, in Chiapas's Lacandon jungle. That visit changed his life plans, leading him to find a small community near San Andrés Larráinzar in the Chiapas highlands where he could live and study the Tzotzil Mayan language. He stayed there for two years.

Having abandoned his studies at the university, Morris stayed in Chiapas and soon began what would become his lifelong research topic: Mayan garments and their iconography. In his second year, he was hired by FONART[2] to make a collection of Mayan textiles from Chiapas. And with that Morris began his rambles through the Chiapas Highlands, criscrossing it on foot multiple times over the course of three years, sleeping in villages along the way, and eventually buying textiles and other artisan products from 49 communities and collecting information for his future work. Later he repeated this process with the sponsorship of Francesco Pellizzi,

[1] The information presented in this section is based on the interviews conducted by the author with Walter Morris (2015), Fabiola Sánchez (2020), Carol Karasik (2021), Gabriela Gudiño (2022), and Pedro Meza (2022) as well as the interview with Morris by Sarah Booth Conroy (1988).

[2] Fondo Nacional de Artesanía, a federal agency that promoted and marketed artisan products.

compiling the private collection of textiles of which served as his main source of study for many years.

At the same time he was compiling these collections, Morris spent endless hours with the artisans and others he met in the villages he visited asking about the meanings of the designs in the textiles, a task that turned out to be key to his work since it allowed him to write several books and articles on Mayan textile iconography. In this way, he published his first book *A millennium of weaving in Chiapas* (1984) followed by *Living maya* (1987b), both of which gave him wide recognition as a specialist in the question of Mayan textiles.

In addition to scientific work, from the beginning he was also involved in activist, social work, taking a leading role in the creation of the Sna Jolobil cooperative in 1976-78 to help weavers market their products. This project was recognized with various awards, including the MacArthur Foundation grant that Morris received in 1983 for his efforts to preserve the Mayan textile tradition of Chiapas.

In 1986, he married and moved to the United States, although he did not abandon his research in Mexico. Over the next decade, while traveling to other parts of Latin America to promote artisan cooperatives and the maintenance of textile traditions, he also returned regularly to the highlands of Chiapas and Guatemala to continue his own projects. Then in 1996, for personal reasons, he returned to live in San Cristóbal de las Casas. He bought back his old house adjoining the Na Bolom inn and research center, and in lived permanently until his death in October 2019.

During this period of his life, as before, he dedicated himself to promoting the Mayan textiles of Chiapas, writing, supporting the Sna Jolobil cooperative, and making guided trips to the Mayan communities. He also participated in research projects with the the New World Archaeological Foundation. During these years he also served as director of Na Bolom A.C. for three years, and continued after his directorship as a research fellow. His book *Guía textil de los Altos de Chiapas* (2009) was the product of this period. His last book, *Maya Threads: A Woven History of Chiapas,* co-authored with Carol Karasik as mentioned earlier, was published in 2015.

A chronology of Walter F. Morris's main works

Batz'i Luch. Diseños de la indumentaria tradicional en Chiapas *(1976)* *y* Luchetik. El lenguaje textil de los Altos de Chiapas *(1979)*

Modestly described by Morris as "low-cost pamphlets on textile designs" (Morris, 1996: 42), they are two brochures of the same format and type dedicated to the textile symbology of the Highlands of Chiapas with designs illustrated by Pedro Meza. *Batz'i Luch* consists of 17 pages presenting the main designs of eleven Tzotzil and Tzeltal Mayan communities. *Luchetik* is made up of 38 pages where *Batz'i Luch's* designs are included and some new ones are added. At the end there is a new section with Zoque designs from Ocozocuautla. In addition, two maps are added on the

spatial distribution of the designs in the huipils and also a drawing of a backstrap loom with the names of its pieces in three languages.

In 1975 Morris hired Meza to make drawings of the textile designs that were part of the Pellizzi Collection. These drawings were originally produced in color on graph paper, but were published in black and white for funding reasons. Morris decided to publish some of them in booklets so that the weavers could use them to make their weaves. The two brochures were proved to be very successful with tourists and were reprinted several times in both Spanish and English with print runs of a thousand copies.

These two brochures are the first time that the designs of the Mayan textiles of Chiapas are presented in such a detailed way. In addition, each design is accompanied by its name in Spanish, English and Mayan that was registered by Morris during his pilgrimage through Chiapas in search of pieces for the textile collections. As Morris himself points out: there are approximately 1,500 designs on Mayan textiles from Chiapas that "have a symbolic content rooted in the traditions and mythologies of indigenous peoples" (Morris, 1976: 1).

It should be noted that iconographic textile material from Chiapas remained unstudied until the 1970s when Marta Turok introduced Morris to the world of Mayan textile designs. Taking the baton, he decided to compile and catalog all this material, becoming the first to conduct such a methodical study, and not only carrying out his iconographic analysis, but delving into the iconological level of the examined designs. This first study became the background for several works on textile iconography, one of his main lines of research, over more than 40 years.

A Catalog of Textiles and Folkart of Chiapas, Mexico *(1979)*

The catalog consists of two volumes with 493 pages in total. It consists of the presentation of a variety of textiles as well as various objects such as tools, footwear, musical instruments, weaving implements, and tourist pieces from 98 Tzotzil and Tzeltal Mayan communities that became part of three collections: the Pellizzi Collection, the Pomar Collection, and the Morris Collection. The first volume and a part of the second are dedicated to the larger collection that is Pellizzi's, which was formed and studied by Morris between 1974-1977 thanks to the support of Francesco Pellizzi, who financed the creation of the collection. The second volume presents the two remaining collections.

The history of the creation of the catalog and the compilation of its pieces is recounted in detail by Morris in the article "Textiles de Chiapas. La colección Pellizzi" (Morris, 1994), where the main theme is this collection, its history and its future in a textile museum. The project for a textile museum where the Pellizzi Collection would be exhibited was an old aspiration of Morris's, which for many years he tried to make a reality, unfortunately without success.

Composed of eight hundred pieces, the Pellizzi Collection was begun with the purpose of rescuing popular art to preserve it for future generations of weavers and

scholars. The principal focus of the collection, according to Morris the most complete for that time, was to gather in one place examples of Chiapas' brocaded textiles, the complex technique most in danger of disappearing and the one to make him realize the urgency of conservation. Accordingly, pieces containing brocaded designs were selected for the catalog (Morris, 1994: 46; 2015). The catalog's drawback was that the photographs were in black and white, very small and of poor print quality, which meant that in many cases the brocaded designs were not clearly visible.

Nevertheless, this catalog was a groundbreaking work, not only making the Mayan costume of Chiapas widely known for the first time, but also sharing other objects of daily and ritual life. Over all, the catalog was a comprehensive ethnographic compendium that, in Morris's words, "established Chiapas textiles as an art form among museum authorities" (Morris, 1996: 42). Morris's very brief comments next to some photograph also provide valuable information that in itself represents a significant contribution to the ethnography of the Maya of the Chiapas Highlands. In Morris's words, "el catálogo es un ordenamiento de notas del antropólogo para otros antropólogos" (Morris, 1994: 47).

A Short History of Maya Costume *(n.d.)*

A typed working paper of 146 loose pages with several missing, *A short history* had neither an index nor a bibliography. The text was written in English and was a draft of a monumental work on the Mayan textile tradition of Chiapas that was never published. Its translation into Spanish was made by Morris's friend Francisco Álvarez and publication in 1982 with the title *Los textiles mayas de Chiapas*. Preparation and publication was sponsored by the Governor of Chiapas, Juan Sabines Gutiérrez, whose mandate was from 1979 to 1982. The book was to have consisted of 600 pages in two volumes with 1 500 drawings and 1 300 photographs and a printing cost of 3 500 000.00 pesos (in those years of high inflation, the value of this budget slipped from approximately 10 000 dollars in 1979 to 5 000 in 1981). With its extensive illustrations, this would have been a spectacular work that would have summarized the first ten, extremely fruitful years of Morris's work on Chiapas' Mayan textiles. Projected to cover the history of the Mayan textile tradition in Chiapas from the Preclassic to the year 1981, the book was expected to consist of fifteen short chapters of 10-15 pages each, plus an appendix containing various tales narrated by the weavers. As it happened, the titles of the chapters anticipated the titles of several of Morris's later works, including *Fall Fashions* (1985c); *Flowers, Saints and Toads* (1985a); *Symbolism of a Ceremonial Huipil of the Highland Maya Community of Magdalenas* (1987a); plus the text of his original descriptive brochure *Batz'i Luch* (1976). Meanwhile, completed but unpublished sections of the book later appeared in the books *A Milenium of Weaving in Chiapas* (1984); *Guía textil de los Altos de Chiapas* (2009); *Dinero hecho a mano* (1996); and *Maya Threads: A Woven History of Chiapas* (2015). Unfortunately, the text was published in pieces over more than forty years and thus lost the substantiality of a single work. More tragically still,

several segments of the planned text never saw the light of day at all, including the first eight-page chapter on archaeological textiles and their impressions on ceramics, and groups of pages that were apparently completed but are now missing. In all, the fact that this text was not published as planned is a real loss for the study of Mayan textile traditions.

"Piñuela Cave Textiles" (1982)

A 25-page manuscript co-authored with John Clark for the *Papers of the New World Archaeological Foundation*, "Piñuela Cave Textiles" was expected to appear in 1984, but was finally never published. In this brief report, Morris analyzes different textile fragments found during excavation in the cave of Piñuela, Chiapas, dating to approximately the Late Classic or Postclassic. Ten fragments were examined in detail, with descriptions of their physical characteristics and the weaving techniques used. The article ends with a table of pre-Columbian textile impressions from both the Maya and Zoque areas of Chiapas, prepared using excavation reports published up to 1982.

The material presented in the report is important for the study of prehispanic weaving techniques, since in the entire state there are only three caves where significant textile fragments from the Postclassic period were preserved. However, because it was not published, this text went almost unnoticed by other researchers on the subject, only one of whom mentions it when referring to the textile samples from Chiapas.[3]

The meticulous table at the end of the report is an essential source for researchers on Chiapas textiles. Curiously, this table was finally published many years later as part of the analysis of textile impressions on ceramics from Soconusco, which will be discussed below.

A Millenium of Weaving in Chiapas / Mil años de tejido en Chiapas *(1984)*

A Millenium of Weaving was Morris's first book to appear simultaneously in English and Spanish. Fifty-six pages long, it contains a large number of photographs in both color and black and white by Jeffrey Foxx, Micela Guirk, Carlos Martínez Suárez and Gertrude Duby Blom. The short text was originally written for the Pellizzi Collection exhibition that took place at the Na Bolom and the Centro Cultural Maya in the Ex-Convent of Santo Domingo in San Cristóbal de las Casas in 1984.

Although Morris calls it a "booklet on the history of Chiapas costume" (Morris, 1996: 42), the book covers various aspects of textiles, beginning with the designs and their symbolism, and then presenting an excursion to prehispanic and colonial

[3] The manuscript is noted in the bibliography, p. 284, of Merle Green Robertson and Virginia M. Fields (eds.), 1985, *The Fifth Palenque Round Table, 1983*, Pre-Columbian Art Institute, Monterey, California, where it is called "The Textiles of Piñuela Cave".

times. Although the texts are brief, their importance lies in the fact that they represent the first attempt to present a brief, but chronologically complete synthesis what was known about the cloth history of Chiapas up to the date of publication.

"Flores, santos y sapos: simbolismo en el diseño textil maya antiguo y moderno" (1985a)

The article, which is a translation from English,[4] presents a substantial selection of the most important information compiled by Morris through the mid-1980s on the subject of Mayan textile designs from Chiapas. It consists of two sections: the first discusses modern designs, and the second prehispanic ones. Both sections contain tables organizing the main motifs according to their graphic representation, and also present a comparative table of designs made with the brocade technique between the prehispanic and modern Mayas. Making this comparison reinforces the idea expressed above about the historical continuity of the designs in Mayan garments. Morris also offers a detailed numerological analysis pointing out coincidences between the numbers that were important in prehispanic times and those of the designs on modern huipils from Magdalenas, municipio of Aldama.

The article is transcendental for the study of textile iconography, since here Morris presents an iconographic-iconological analysis of individual designs, both prehispanic and modern, and also shows their comparison based on formal similarities. This was the first case study of this type involving Mayan textile iconography. In addition, Morris proposes to analyze modern designs through a three-dimensional matrix that shows the interrelationship between designs with similar graphic representation and meaning. This matrix is the last stage of the iconographic analysis in which Morris tried to make sense of all the material he had studied and classified in all the years until that point.

Warped Glyphs: A Reading of Maya Textiles (1985b)

Warped Glyphs was presented at the Fourth Round Table of Palenque in 1980 and published five years later. In the paper, Morris first briefly explained the symbolism of modern Mayan brocade designs, and then made a comparison with the prehispanic designs of Yaxchilán. For the analysis, he used Mayan huipils from both Los Altos de Chiapas (Magdalenas/Aldama) and Guatemala (Chichicastenango).

Throughout the text, Morris explained that the brocaded symbols in modern huipils turn out to be a harmonious map of the cosmos and Mayan mythology and that they are concerned with two main themes: cosmology and fertility. He also came to understand that the Mayan textile tradition with its precise mathematical counting has preserved remnants of ancient Mayan numerology.

[4] Original name in English is *Flowers, Saints and Toads: Ancient and Modern Maya Textile Desing Symbolism.*

It is interesting to note that it is the only work where Guatemalan textile iconography is included for comparative purposes; in later work, his research focused exclusively on the symbolism of the Mayan huipils of Chiapas. Apparently the intention of including the Guatemalan material at first seemed like a good idea, and it is, but he did not count on the fact that this implies a lot of work between readings, trips, interviews, desk work, etc.

Written in the late 1970s, this text already contains the main ideas on the symbolism of Maya ceremonial huipils that flow through all of Morris's subsequent work:

1) continuity of the Mayan textile tradition since prehispanic times, both in techniques and designs;
2) representation of the universe in a ceremonial huipil, when wearing it the woman placed herself in the center of the universe;
3) conservation of traditional numerology whose origins are found in the mathematics and astronomy of the prehispanic Mayas;
4) manifestation of Mayan mythology in textile iconography.

Fall Fashions: Lagartero Figurine Costume at the End of Classic Period (1985c)

Like the previous paper, *Fall Fashions* was presented at the Fifth Round Table of Palenque in 1983 and published in the corresponding report in 1985. It deals with the analysis of the clothing worn by the ceramic figurines from the Lagartero site of the Classic period. Highlighting and examining the entire variety of garments and their variations (huipils, skirts, quexquemitles, belts, etc.), Morris proceeds to analyze designs that can be observed on the garments.

This work is part of a larger text co-authored with Susanna Ekholm that was planned to be published as part of the NWAF publications, but as in the case of the study on the textiles of the Piñuela cave, the NWAF never published this one either.

The material analyzed in the text is highly valuable for the study of the subject of prehispanic Mayan clothing since, as Morris himself mentions, "The Lagartero figurines offer some of the most detailed evidence for ancient Maya costume and design" (Morris, 1985c: 253), and it is evident that he knew how to take advantage of it to analyze every detail of the costume of each figurine. With this article Morris demonstrated himself to be at the forefront of academic research on prehispanic Mayan textiles.

Living maya (1987b) / Presencia maya (1991)

This second of Morris's books was awarded the *Ansfield-Wolf Book Award* in the "Nonfiction" category in 1988. It is a work that brings together all the information collected by him during fifteen years of studies, and therefore presents a quite extensive study of 224 pages. The book's opening chapters addresse the history of Chiapas textiles, beginning with the Colonial period, and then turning to the Prehispanic period and the costumes of the classic Maya of Yaxchilán and

Bonampak. From there it turns to a description of the Highlands of Chiapas and its inhabitants, the Mayas, showing that daily and ritual life is intertwined with mythology, citing the *Popol Vuh* on several occasions. Next, he analyzes Mayan textile iconography, highlighting its relationship with the earth and the universe. The book closes with the religious aspects of modern Maya life, talking about their beliefs and festivals.

In general, *Living Maya* is a multi-thematic ethnography that covers various communities in the Chiapas Highlands, and according to Morris's words, builds out from its focus on textiles to describe what was happening in the culture as a whole (*Endangered Threads Documentaries*, 2018: 9:13). For its scope, *Living Maya/Presencia maya* was much more successful than *Mil años de tejido en Chiapas*, attracting many people interested in the question of Mayan textiles to Chiapas weaving, including collectors, as Morris himself indicates (Morris, 1996: 42). Also, because so much information is presented about Mayan beliefs, customs, and festivities, this was to be Morris's most cited, and most commercially successful book. Thirty-five years after its publication, it is currently in the collections of more than 750 libraries worldwide. This success could be conditioned by two factors: on the one hand, a luxurious, color hardcover design and dozens of full color internal photographs by Jeffrey Foxx; on the other, the content was fresh and unique and written in the form of a captivating narrative, co-authored with Carol Karasik.

Referring to this book in 1996, Morris notes: "In 'Living Maya', I focused on weaving designs as a way of illuminating the history and art of a complex culture" (*ibid.*: xxxii). In this way, it can be said that the main contribution of the text consists in showing the Mayan textiles of the Highlands of Chiapas in their historical, social and religious context, and thus demonstrating all the wealth that can be contained in a single piece of clothing.

Handmade Money: Latin American Artisans in the Marketplace / Dinero hecho a mano: Artesanos de América Latina en el mercado (1996)

In *Handmade Money*, a 168-page book published simultaneously in English and Spanish, Morris addressed the socioeconomic aspect of artisan production by presenting "case studies that illustrate the cultural, social, and economic impact of different forms of marketing on the lives of artisans and their communities" (Morris, 1996: xxxii). The book consists of four chapters and is accompanied by the black and white photographs of Antonio Turok. In it, Morris recounts the experiences marketing handicrafts of five artisan cooperatives from various Latin American countries, information he compiled between 1989-90. The groups were chosen, in Morris's words, "because they had developed effective marketing strategies for their products" (*ibid.*: xxxiii), and included the following: Alfadom from the Dominican Republic (pottery), Amano from Honduras (ornamental flowers), CASEM from Costa Rica (souvenir crafts), Madres Azuayas from Ecuador (textiles) and Sna Jolobil from Mexico (textiles).

The last, Sna Jolobil, which still exists under different name, was created in San Cristóbal de las Casas in 1976-78 by a group of collaborators in which Morris actively participated, becoming its director. In addition to marketing the textiles, this cooperative focused on the work of conservation and salvage of the traditional Mayan textiles of Chiapas. It is in this book, in the introduction, where Morris tells the famous story of how he decided to work with the Mayan weavers to help them market their products after an encounter with Rosha Hernández in the San Andrés market (*ibid.*: xxvii).

Morris has taken a serious interest in the socioeconomic aspect of textiles since his involvement in the creation and management of the Sna Jolobil textile cooperative. This fact opens up the possibility of exploring another facet of textiles outside of their symbolism or history, as he himself points out: "In this study I place myself in the market, where culture and art are minor issues within the noisy commercial environment" (*ibid.*: xxxii). In this way, Morris does everything possible to get support for various projects to help the weavers. For this reason, he became part of the Ayuda a los Artesanos (ATA) project that began in 1976.

In addition to studying the five groups of artisans, Morris makes an important reflection on the subject of art and crafts, showing their differences, explaining their roots, their subsequent evolution and their development in the course of the 20th century, which makes this book as a must read for researchers on the subject.

"Textile Impressions on Postsherds from the Proyecto Soconusco Study Area" (2004)

This 15-page article was published as an appendix to the book *Postclassic Soconusco Society: the Late Prehistory of the Coast of Chiapas, Mexico,* by Barbara Voorhies and Janine Gasco. In Morris's contribution, he presents analyses of the textiles found by the archaeologists as impressions on clay pots. In total, he examines 227 potsherds that contain textile impressions, presenting them in a table with their main characteristics such as technique, dimensions, and their location in the body of the vessel. It is precisely in this work, twenty two years later, where the table of prehispanic textile impressions of the Maya and Zoque area, which was initially made for the report of the textile remains from the Piñuela cave, was finally published.

The conclusion reached by Morris was that the fragments of cloth, which were actually an important potter's tool used for the production of mold-made comals in Soconusco, were made of cotton and were made with open plain weave. Since the large number of textile impressions suggests that clothing made of cotton was apparently an inexpensive y expendable item in the Soconusco, he also proposed that in prehispanic times the region must have been an important cotton-growing area.

Textile impressions on ceramics is a major topic for the history of textile technology. During his life Morris participated in the realization of several projects where he studied both archaeological textile samples and their ceramic impressions, although only this one text was published. The others remained as typescripts and are currently inaccessible for study. As a result, despite the work's importance to

archaeologists, Morris's contribution on this subject are little known even among scholars of Mayan textiles.

Geometrías de la imaginación. Diseño e iconografía de Chiapas (2006)

Geometrías de la imaginación is an illustrated catalog of the designs found in the Mayan clothing of highland Chiapas. Part of a series of books titled *Geometrías de la imaginación* published by the National Folk Arts Program of Mexico's National Council of Culture and Arts (CONACULTA after its initials in Spanish), it appeared in 2009 and consists of 181 pages. The result of more than thirty years of research, the book contains a classification of designs from ten Mayan communities and is divided into two main parts: iconographic glossary and iconographic motifs.

In the first part, the designs are presented in color and are classified into four groups-folders according to their shape: Earth and Heaven, snakes and flowering plants, community or ancestors, toads and saints. The second part presents the main iconographic motifs of each community in black and white.

The history of this catalog begins at the end of the seventies when Morris worked for FONART buying textiles in the Mayan communities of the Highlands of Chiapas (Morris, 2015). To record the information, he makes small cards for each design, classified according to their graphic representation. Next to each design, he included the name that the weavers gave it in Maya and then translated it into English. The cards were organized by geographic location and compiled over the course of several years in a wooden card file. To find out the names of the designs, he eventually interviewed nearly three thousand women (*Endangered Threads Documentaries*, 2018: 17:43), which makes this catalog a valuable source of ethnographic, historical, and linguistic information.

The importance of the catalog today is that it is still the most complete catalog of Chiapas's Mayan textile iconography, and in addition to its classificatory and interpretive aspects, it is now an almost fifty year old historical record as well.

Guía textil de los altos de Chiapas / A Textile Guide to the Highlands of Chiapas / Un guide de textile vers les Hautes Terres du Chiapas (2009)

Oriented to the tourism sector, this book quickly became well-known and has been reissued and reprinted several times. It has two different editions: the first was published by Na Bolom A.C. in 2009 and reprinted in 2010, and the second with a different cover and format was published by THRUMS in 2011 and CONACULTA in 2014, both with the participation of Na Bolom A.C. The version discussed here is the large format first edition, which consisted of 160 pages and was presented in three languages, Spanish, English and French. In addition to being the co-author of the text, again with Carol Karasik, Morris also participated as a photographer: along with the photos of Alfredo Martínez and Janet Schwartz, thirty of the books photos are by Morris himself. At the end of the book there is a matrix of the textile designs of

Chiapas that classifies and organizes the motifs by parts and axes, the same as the article "Flores, santos y sapos" (Morris, 1985a) but without explanation.

As noted in its name, the book is a tourist guide to the traditional garments of the nineteen Mayan communities of the Highlands of Chiapas, its numerous color photographs bringing us even closer to their culture. Beyond this popular purpose, however, it also contains, albeit brief, original ethnographic information. According to Morris, the book's purpose is "trying to describe what happened in the last decade, really briefly, of how all these changes have happened" (*Endangered Threads Documentaries*, 2018: 10:05). At the beginning he presents a record of the traditional exchanges of saints between the four neighboring communities of San Andrés, Santa Marta, Santiago and Magdalenas. From there he proceeds to describe the traditional costumes of each community in detail, and then and then to record the recent changes in each. To the extent possible, for each community he also presents historical data on what clothing was like in the 19th century and how it changed throughout the 20th. The final product is a summary of the information collected by Morris over the course of four decades of research in the Mayan villages of the Chiapas Highlands.

The transcendental idea that underlies almost all of Morris's works about the long duration and deep symbolism of the Mayan textile tradition are summed up thus: "With 3000 years of patience, every woman makes elaborate brocades and embroidery that tell us where she is from, reveal the customs she grew up with, and express her creative spirit" (Morris, 2010: 19).

Maya Threads: A Woven History of Chiapas (2015)

Morris's last book to be written in English, *Maya Threads* is 214 pages long and contains thirteen chapters accompanied by the photographs of Janet Schwartz and Morris himself. Co-authored with Carol Karasik,[5] the book brought together texts on various topics related to Mayan textiles from Chiapas, including weaving techniques and their historical-archaeological background, festive and ceremonial costumes and their origin, the appearance of the technique of embroidery and its development among the Highlands of Chiapas, and the costumes of Chiapas's non-Maya, Zoque people. Through all of these, Morris ingeniously manages to weave together the history of Mayan costumes and their evolution over the course of the 20th century in more than thirty towns in Chiapas.

In 2016 *Maya Threads* was awarded the *Benjamin Franklin Gold Award* for excellence in editorial content, photography and design. When I talked to Morris about the book, he told me that "I started it in 2009-2010 when I was constantly going to different communities, and every week I discovered a new community and a new

[5] The fact that Carol Karasik appears as the second author is quite significant since she is the one who gave Morris's ideas written form. With this mention on the cover, his key role in bringing his books to light is finally recognized.

garment; so there is a bit of everything, there are parts from *Living Maya*, from *Guía textil*, and there are new things" (Morris, 2015). Indeed, the book is a mosaic of stories that, although they deal with different times and peoples, come together in the common point that is the Mayan dress.

Among the thirteen chapters, several present new themes and perspectives. The first chapter "A Classic Family Dispute" brings to life almost as a captivating novel a silent story about the struggle for political dominance among the women of power of Yaxchilán during the Classic period. Examining the lintels of this ruined ninth century city, he explains in great detail how this struggle found expression in the splendid attire carved into the stone: richly decorated huipils.

Also important is the research presented in chapter three "From Airy Gauze to Cutting Edge Fashion" on open weaving among the Tzotzils of Venustiano Carranza. Here he briefly summarizes the information presented in his previous works on the textile impressions mentioned above, adding the case of Venustiano Carranza, the only place in Chiapas where they still make open plane weave cloth. Beginning with the historical background of this weaving technique and pointing out its prehispanic roots, Morris recounts that he meticulously examined hundreds of ceramic textile impressions that always featured plane weaving, coming to the conclusion that this technique was the oldest and most widespread in the precolumbian era.

What sets this book apart from others is the historical context that Morris presents in each chapter. Each point of his description is explained with historical references that contextualize the processes of change, borrowings and innovations in Mayan clothing. For example, describing the carnival of Chamula, he points out that the origin of the *Max's* costumes is found in the French military dress of the nineteenth century when Mexico was under foreign intervention of the French army (Morris and Karasik, 2015: 62-63).

In the Epilogue Morris and Karasik explain that the book is not about fashion *per se*, but about "how a culture preserves traditions, adopts new ideas, and adapts to changing times" (Morris and Karasik, 2015: 203). After reading the work, it is fair to say that this objective has been achieved.

Final comments

After examining Morris's published works, it is possible to talk about two major periods in his academic life and personal life between his arrival in Chiapas as a young man in 1972 and his death in 2019: the first from his arrival in Chiapas until his move to the United States in the mid-1980s, the second from his return to Chiapas in 1996 and until his death. The first was characterized by intense productivity in projects and publications, when extensive, almost continuous fieldwork led to a stream of new, strikingly innovative ideas. The second was a stage continuous observation, but also reflection and reexamination of previous materials and texts. Some ideas were reconsidered, previous work was compiled and re-analyzed, and new projects

were taken on as he watched changes in communities where he had always worked and took into account the contributions of others. The time of greatest scientific productivity was located near the intersection of these two periods, in the 1980s, when Morris wrote his most important works, *A Short History of Maya Costume* (n.d.), *Mil años de tejido en Chiapas* (1984), *Flores, santos y sapos: simbolismo en el diseño textil maya antiguo y moderno* (1985a), *Warped Glyphs: a Reading of Maya Textiles* (1985b), *Fall Fashions: Lagartero Figurine Costume at the End of Classic Period* (1985c), *Symbolism of a Ceremonial Huipil of the Highland Tzotzil Maya Community of Magdalenas, Chiapas* (1987a), and *Presencia maya* (1991).

It is important to point out that his research did not focus exclusively on textiles, but rather that his interests were much broader and varied over the years. Thus, in the last years of his life he was interested in religion and its manifestations in the Mayan communities and as proof of this is his article on the sacred sites of Chamula called "Religión en concreto" (2013) published in the book *Religión maya: rasgos y desarrollo histórico*.

It is worth to mention that Morris could not cover all the facets of Mayan textiles for the obvious reason of their versatility. For example, Morris paid little attention to the topic of manufacturing. That is, he did not elaborate on the processes of cloth and thread production, neither on the techniques of brocade except for a few mentions in some of his books. Another piece that was left out by Morris is the religious-magical symbolism of the textile.

Meanwhile, his titanic work of conservation and promotion of Chiapas textile art throughout his life has borne fruit today, when textile iconography, once shunned as an insignificant, solely "indigenous" phenomenon, has become the state's business card, penetrating so many aspects of Chiapas's cultural and commercial life that it is now ubiquitous, visible in tourist brochures, in the decorations of shopping malls, hotels and the state's airports, in designer bags and wallets, even on the sidewalks. This transformation was noticed by Morris himself: "The symbols of the textiles are now part of the repertoire of the iconography of Chiapas. [...] The renaissance in textiles has served as a starting point towards cultural pride" (Morris, 1996: 129).

In general terms, textile research in Highlands Chiapas is not an easy task for anybody nor it was for Morris. Throughout the years of his pilgrimage in the mountains of Chiapas, he had to journey by foot. There were no highways at that point. A lot of information was outside of his reach for the simple reason of being a male because textile is an exclusively female domain and the weaving women do not share all the information with the opposite gender. On the other side, impeccable knowledge of Tzotzil language allowed him to interview thousands of weavers without any interpreter in between.

Contrary to those past days, nowadays scholars of Mayan textiles in Highlands Chiapas have it easier in many ways: there are paved roads that take you to every community, many weavers speak Spanish, there are numerous scholarship opportunities and the only true obstacle is to "win over" the loyalty and relationship of the

women so they would share their knowledge on the subject provided the level of trust is still very low. Some weavers are hesitant to narrate restricted information to a stranger.

Since most of Morris's works are characterized by their interdisciplinary approach, while always underlining the idea of conserving this ancient tradition into the future, it would be fair to indicate that all of them provide precious information to know and understand the Mayan textile tradition of Chiapas.

Accordingly, it might be said that Walter Morris's contribution to scientific knowledge consists of three main points:

1) The compilation of Mayan ancestral knowledge by recording the names given to the designs by the weavers of Chiapas. If this had not been done in the 1970s, it is likely that there would have been no way to do it afterwards, since this knowledge was falling into oblivion;
2) The classification of the designs according to their graphic representation and, consequently, the creation of a catalog of designs of inestimable value to future generations of researchers;
3) The analysis of textile iconography as a long-lasting historical fact, proposing its study in retrospect by comparing current designs with those of the prehispanic period.

The scientific legacy of Morris's works is immeasurable. Through them he managed to open a very broad path for future multidisciplinary research that includes various approaches to the textile subject. Nonetheless, it is imperative to highlight influence Morris' work exercised on other studies of Mayan textiles. For many, his works have been the inspiration source to do one's own study of this subject. To such a degree that today and in future days, it will be hard to impart a research project related to Mayan textiles without relying on books and articles published by Walter F. Morris Jr.

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