

## SOME NOTES ON WIVES AND CONCUBINES

Boguchwała Tuszyńska  
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland

### **Abstract**

In this paper I am trying to find an answer to the controversial matter of alleged polygamy practised by the Classic Maya kings. In fact we do not have sufficient evidence for it. Taking into account all the information we have about of more women than one in the kings' lives, we find such evidence only in Caracol, Dos Pilas and Yaxchilan. It is suggested that in these kingdoms each ruler had only one wife at a time. Special emphasis is given to Yaxchilan and its two kings: Itzamnaaj Bahlam III and Bird Jaguar IV.

### **Introduction**

Did the Maya kings of the Classic period practise polygamy? This problem has not been solved satisfactorily until now. Diego de Landa (1991:50) writing about many different Maya customs and aspects of their life, tells us: "Nunca los yucatenences tomaron más de una (mujer) como se ha hallado en otras partes tener muchas juntas". His words are a little confusing because we do not know exactly what Landa meant when saying "Yucatec": the Maya living in the Yucatan Peninsula only, or the Maya in general, considering "otras partes" as the lands inhabited by non-Maya-speaking people, for example Aztecs. However, he probably thought about the Maya. So, in his opinion, there was no polygamy among the Maya. As Webster states (2002:133) "Aztec kings often took more than one wife for political purposes but whether the Classic Maya pursued this same strategy is unclear". In case of the Maya we cannot be so sure because we do not have sufficient evidence as far as the Maya are concerned. We know the names of the women associated with rulers because, in most cases, they are recorded as mothers of kings in parentage statements. Unfortunately the expression *yatan*<sup>1</sup> (his wife) had not been frequently used in the Classic Maya inscriptions. The Maya kings usually married women from other kingdoms to establish in this way a joint bloodline and alliances with other royal families. Culbert (1996:333) writes that marriage was used as a mechanism to gain influence at, or even control over another site. But even if inscriptions associated with the lives of kings mention more than one woman, it does not necessarily mean that a ruler had two (or more) wives exactly at the same time. If he reigned for a long time, it was quite possible that after the death of his first wife, he decided to get married again. We can be certain that in the Classic period many illnesses or complications associated with

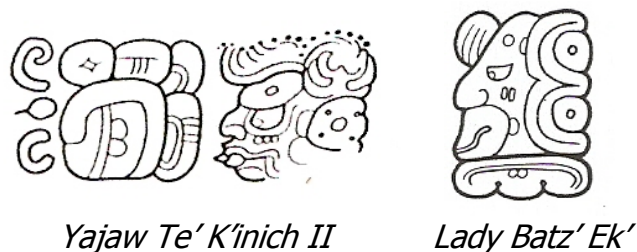
---

<sup>1</sup> The expression *yatan* (**ya-AT-na**) – "his wife" was first read by Floyd Lounsbury (1984:178-179).

the birth-giving also took place and may have caused women's deaths. When we look at the list of women mentioned in the Maya inscriptions from the Classic period we find only four cases when more than one woman was considered by Mayanists as a wife or concubine. Martin & Grube (2008:56,88,126,131) give one example from Caracol of more than one marriage, one example from Dos Pilas and two examples from Yaxchilan.

### ***Caracol***

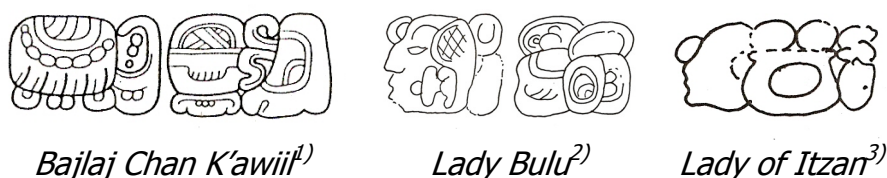
In Caracol we can easily find an explanation for the second marriage of the king Yajaw Te' K'inich II, who ruled from A.D. 553 to A.D. 593. Inscriptions from Caracol mention two women associated with this king. The first one is known only as Lady 1 and she gave him a son – the future king "Knot Ajaw", who was born on A.D. 575 and acceded into rulership in A.D. 599. As far as I know Lady 1 is mentioned only in his parentage statement. If the king already had ensured the continuity of his lineage, we can ask why he needed another wife. His second wife – Lady Batz' Ek' came to Caracol in A.D. 584 and she gave birth to the king's second son – K'an II in A.D. 588, 13 years after Lady 1's son had been born. I suggest that the first wife of Yajaw Te' K'inich died before A.D. 584. Of course this idea may be only speculative but it seems worthy of consideration. In fact we have no record about Lady 1's health but not all Maya women were long-lived. Probably the Caracol king, as a widower, decided to marry another woman. From the later inscription (Caracol, Stela 3) and from the possible burial place of Lady Batz' Ek' (in Caana, Structure B-19) we know that she was a very important person during the reign of Yajaw Te' K'inich and, above all, she played a very influential – in terms of marriage politics and alliances - role during the reign of his son, K'an II. Thus, we should consider Lady Batz' Ek' as a second wife, following the first one (after she had died) rather than a secondary wife or a concubine (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Name glyphs of Yajaw Te' K'inich II and Lady Batz' Ek'; drawings by Grube and Martin (2008: 88,91).

### ***Dos Pilas***

Another example of more than one marriage comes from Dos Pilas. Inscriptions mention two women during the life of Bajlaj Chan K'awiil: Lady Bulu and Lady of Itzan (Figure 2). In my opinion the situation in Dos Pilas could have been similar to that of Caracol. Bajlaj Chan K'awiil had two wives but not at the same time. We do not know the dates of births of these two women, but it is possible to extricate some information from the dates concerning their children.



**Figure 2.** Name glyphs of Bajlaj Chan K'awiil and two women associated with him in inscriptions; drawings by: 1) Grube and Martin (2008:56), 2) Schele (2000:229), 3) Fahsen (2002, Fig.8).

The name of Lady Bulu appears only in the parentage statement of her daughter, Lady Wak Chanil, who was sent to Naranjo to re-establish the local dynasty. The only information we have is that in A.D. 682 Lady Wak Chanil arrived at Naranjo. Probably she was about 15-20 years old at that moment. Stela 24 from A.D. 702 (20 years later) shows her image as a really adult woman. The second wife of Bajlaj Chan K'awiil was a Lady from Itzan. It is of interest that the stela dedicated to her was erected in the Main Plaza of Dos Pilas. The Lady from Itzan was the mother of Itzamnaaj K'awiil, who was born in A.D. 673, in exile<sup>2</sup>, during the war between Dos Pilas and Tikal. As we can see Itzamnaaj K'awiil was born a few years later than Lady Wak Chanil. In this situation it is quite possible that Lady Bulu died young, she may have been killed during the war. Lady Wak Chanil, being the elder sister, could have been designated as an heir because the Maya system of royal succession allowed not only a son but a daughter, too to become heir<sup>3</sup>. However it seems that Bajlaj Chan K'awiil made the best decision. At that time, considering the state of almost constant wars in Petexbatun, the city of Dos Pilas needed a male heir, a very strong man and a very good warrior. So in A.D. 682, when his son was a 9 year-old heir apparent, Bajlaj Chan K'awiil sent his daughter to Naranjo where she finally became a true queen, too.

### ***Yaxchilan***

In Yaxchilan we have double evidence of more than one woman emerging during the reign of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III and Bird Jaguar IV

#### 1. Women of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III

Martin & Grube (2008:126) give us the names of three wives of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III: Lady K'abal Xook, Lady Sak Biyaan and Lady Uh Joloom Chanil (Figure 3). Let us take a closer look at these three women.



**Figure 3.** Name glyphs of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III and three women associated with him in inscriptions; drawings by Grube and Martin (2008:122,126).

<sup>2</sup> Inscription of Stela 8, Dos Pilas mentions the birth date of Itzamnaaj K'awiil. The Long Count gives us A.D. 673 while the Calendar Round – A.D. 679. Martin & Grube (2008:58) pay attention to this interesting error, suggesting that the ruler wanted to obscure his foreign birth-place.

<sup>3</sup> The best example we find in Palenque where Lady Yohl Ik'nal (a daughter or a sister of Kan Bahlam I) became the queen of Palenque in A.D.583 (Martin & Grube 2008:159-160).

**Lady K'abal Xook** was associated with a very strong and influential local family of the wife of the previous ruler, Bird Jaguar III – Lady Pakal, who, through the marriage, had introduced the second emblem to the royal dynasty of Yaxchilan. Lady K'abal Xook was mentioned by Itzamnaaj Bahlam III in various inscriptions, above all in the texts from the most famous Lintels (23,24,25 and 26) from Structure 23. Thus, we have no doubts about her role and position as the king's wife.

**Lady Sak Biyaan** was not considered by Carolyn Tate (1997:9) to be the wife of Itzamnaaj Bahlam and she (1997:122) considered her to be only a woman in the court of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III. Lady Sak Biyaan is recorded on Lintel 56, Structure 11 (Figure 4) and this is the only time this woman is mentioned in the inscriptions of Yaxchilan. That is why her identity is not clear.

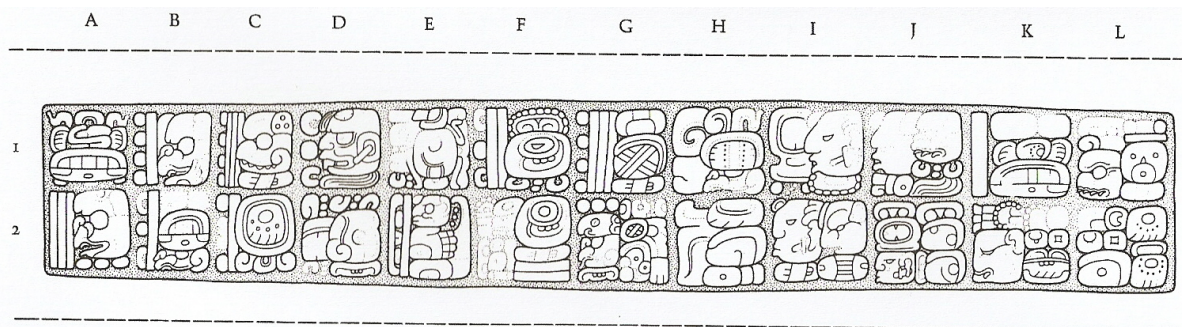


**Figure 4.** Structure 11 (the house of Lady Sak Biyaan), Yaxchilan, photo by author.

McAnany and Plank (2001:108), writing about the dedication of women's houses in Yaxchilan, give us a little hint. Lintel 56 mentions the censuring (*och k'ahk'* event) of the house of Lady Sak Biyaan. McAnany and Plank (2001:114) suggest that she could be Itzamnaaj Bahlam III's daughter and wonder why the king decided to mention this woman several years before his own death and what role she might have played in the ten-year interregnum. It is certainly very intriguing, so, let us look at all the evidence we can find in Yaxchilan. Lady Sak Biyaan used the title *Ixik Ch'ok* (**/IX-ki-ch'o-ko/** in block I2 of Lintel 56) – Young Lady or Lady Princess. The title *ch'ok* usually appears with the names of young lords or princesses of the highest status, especially of heirs. On the other hand Alexander Voss (Sven Gronemeyer, personal communication, 2007) considered this title not as indicating the heir apparent, but rather a specific position in an office to prove the ability to reign. Barbara MacLeod (1994:133-134) translates the title *ch'ok* as "a lineage member". The same meaning is also given by Schele and Freidel (2000:264). Taking this into account, we can consider Lady Sak Biyaan as a lady associated with the royal family of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III and Lady K'abal Xook rather than as only a king's concubine. At the same time Lady Sak Biyaan carries the so called "vase title"<sup>4</sup> (**/?-IX-K'UH/** in block I1 of Lintel 56) (Figure 5). Proskouriakoff (2001:352) was the first one to point out that this glyph is associated with women in the Maya inscriptions. Grube (cited by Gronemeyer, 2006:34) considered this title to be connected with Goddess O of the codices, the primordial mother and midwife. On the other hand Gaida (cited by Gronemeyer, 2006:34)

<sup>4</sup> Barbara MacLeod (1990:338) suggests a reading of T182 as **JOY**. The inverted vase sign occasionally appears with the affix **jo'**, e.g. in the title of Lady "Jaguar Seat" mentioned on Tikal, Lintel 3.

considered the “vase title” to be a title designating married women who were mothers. But even if his suggestion is right, the collocation of two titles of Lady Sak Biyaan: *ch’ok* and “vase title” together is not the only case in the Maya inscriptions<sup>5</sup>. The other notable observation is the absence of an emblem glyph carried by Lady Sak Biyaan. If she had been a noble lady from a different kingdom, she should have been mentioned with the name of her place of origin (Stuart & Houston 1994: 33-42). In fact, she bears no title of origin because, in my opinion, she was a local woman. Thus, in this case we cannot consider a marriage for political purposes. On the other hand, Lintels 27, 28 and 59 (carved during the reign of Bird Jaguar IV) give us the dates of deaths of many important people from Yaxchilan: Lady Pakal (A.D. 705), Itzamnaaj Bahlam III (A.D. 742), Lady K’abal Xook (A.D. 749) and Lady Uh Joloom Chanil (A.D. 751). There is no mention of Lady Sak Biyaan. If she had been one of the wives of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III – even if she was not an important person to Bird Jaguar IV – her name would have had to appear, too. I do not think that she was Itzamnaaj Bahlam III’s wife, and in A.D. 755 (the dedication of lintels 27, 28 and 59) she was still alive.



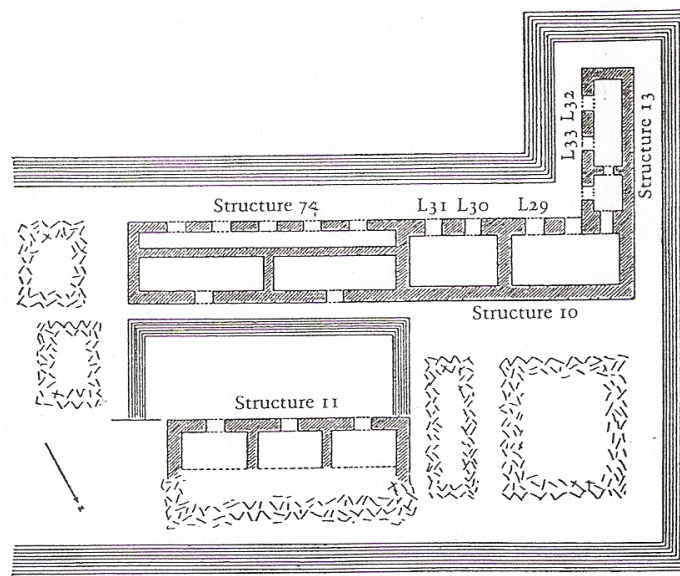
**Figure 5.** Lintel 56 from Structure 11, Yaxchilan, drawing by Graham (1979:121).

If we take into account all this evidence and if we consider Lady Sak Biyaan to be the daughter of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III, a new important question arises: who was the mother of Lady Sak Biyaan? We have two candidates: Lady Uh Joloom Chanil and Lady K’abal Xook. It is difficult to establish the birth date of Lady Sak Biyaan. Lintel 56 was dedicated on April 8<sup>th</sup>, A.D.738. We do not know how old Lady Sak Biyaan was at that time. Lady Uh Joloom Chanil does not seem a good candidate to be the mother of Lady Sak Biyaan. Bird Jaguar IV was born in A.D. 709, 29 years before the dedication of Structure 11. The date of dedication is within the lifetime of Lady K’abal Xook and she seems to be the only candidate. Maybe she never had a son and Lady Sak Biyaan was her only child. If Lady Sak Biyaan had been the daughter of another woman, my opinion is, that Itzamnaaj Bahlam III could not have dedicated her house when Lady K’abal Xook was still alive. It is quite possible that Itzamnaaj Bahlam III, under K’abal Xook’s pressure, designated Lady Sak Biyaan as the heir of the Yaxchilan throne and in this way she could had become Bird Jaguar IV’s rival.

Now we have to look for stronger evidence. Let us imagine the city of Yaxchilan during the reign of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III. What did the Main Plaza look like? On one side of the Main Plaza we have Structure 23 of Lady K’abal Xook, and on the other side we have Structure 11 of Lady Sak Biyaan. I think that it was quite a good idea to build a house for the daughter opposite the house of her mother. From the description of Structure 11, given by

<sup>5</sup> On the Tablet of Slaves from Palenque we find the names of parents of K’inich Ahkal Mo’ Nahb III – Lady Kinuw and Tiwol Chan Maat, both of whom use the title *ch’ok*.

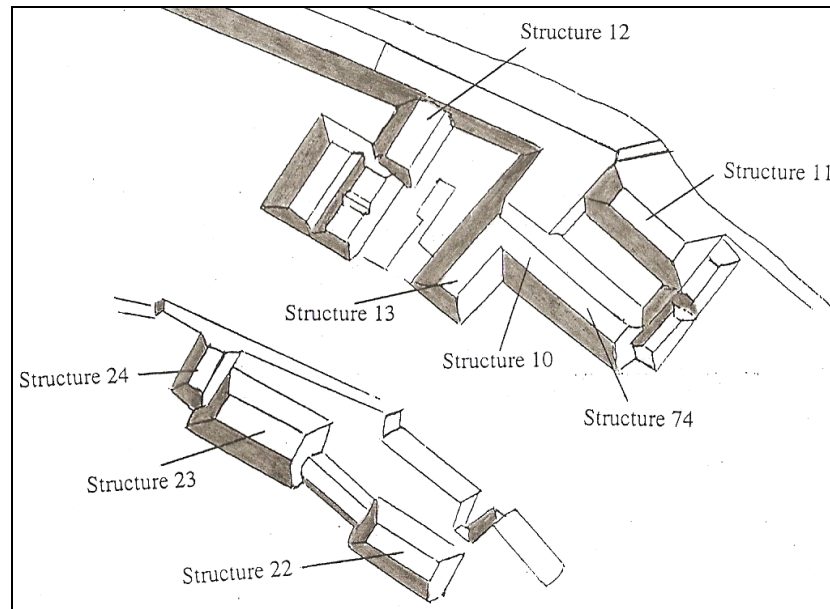
Tate (1997:166) we know that some of the chambers of the structure faced the river and other habitable chambers faced a small courtyard. But some changes occurred during the reign of Bird Jaguar IV. Lintel 31 (Structure 10) tells us that on March 1<sup>st</sup>, A.D. 764, Bird Jaguar IV performed the *och k'ahk'* event of his house (Structure 10) to celebrate the end of 13<sup>th</sup> Tun. Bird Jaguar IV decided to build his house very close to Structure 11, adding Structures 74 and 13. In this way Structure 11 became secluded and clearly off the Main Plaza. McAnany and Plank (2001:120) also pay their attention to the fact that Structure 10 showed its back to Structure 11 (Figure 6). In their opinion Lady Sak Biyaan had something to do with Bird Jaguar IV's delayed accession to the throne of Yaxchilan.



**Figure 6.** Structures 10, 11, 13 and 74, Yaxchilan, plan by Maler (1903:129).

We know that Bird Jaguar IV manipulated the history of his reign. We can be sure that each of his moves was ingenious. I wonder why Bird Jaguar IV dedicated his house on A.D.764. In my opinion Lady Sak Biyaan had died before A.D.764. Only then did Bird Jaguar IV decide to cover up the traces she had left. Someone can say that it would have been better to demolish Structure 11 but we have to remember that members of Lady K'abal Xook family were still living in Yaxchilan and such a move by Bird Jaguar IV could have been interpreted as lack of respect for that family. What Bird Jaguar IV needed was good relations with all local nobles. It seems that this precinct of the city was very important to Bird Jaguar IV. Lintels 29, 30 and 31 from Structure 10 mention the most important events in his life (his birth in A.D. 709, his accession in A.D. 752, the dedication of his house in A.D. 764 and even the forthcoming Period Ending). The date of his birth is emphasized, including a reference to the 819-day cycle and the fire ceremony. Structure 13 was dedicated in A.D. 761. Its lintels (50, 32 and 33) were carved during the reign of Bird Jaguar IV but all the inscriptions are retrospective and we cannot even be sure if the events mentioned there really had taken place. Lintel 33 was probably carved after A.D. 755 but, according to the inscription, the ceremonial flapstaff dance was performed by Bird Jaguar IV in A.D. 747, exactly 5 years after the death of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III. Lintel 32 represents Itzamnaaj Bahlam III dancing with the K'awiil sceptre and Lady Uh Joloom Chanil holding a bundle on the day 09.13.17.15.13 6 Ben 16 Mak (A.D.709), exactly one day after the bloodletting rite by Lady K'abal Xook. Lintel 50 is badly eroded and we cannot see the date or the name of the protagonist. Probably here we have Itzamnaaj

Bahlam III himself, performing the flapstaff dance<sup>6</sup>. I think that it is not only a coincidence that Structure 13 (with three retrospective inscriptions focusing on Bird Jaguar IV's rights to the throne of Yaxchilán) and Structure 10 (the Bird Jaguar IV's house) were built exactly in the same part of the Main Plaza partly obscuring Structure 11 (Figure 7).



**Figure 7.** Plan based on drawing by Philip Winton (in Martin and Grube, 2008:116) showing the Structures 10, 12, 13, 22, 24 and 74 which house lintels so important to Bird Jaguar IV, and their location in relation to Structure 23 (the house of Lady K'abal Xook) and Structure 11 (the house of Lady Sak Biyaan) in the Main Plaza of Yaxchilan.

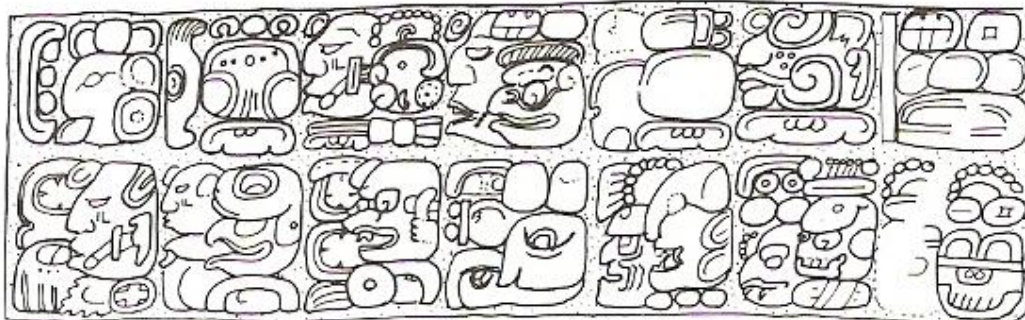
If Lady Sak Biyaan died about A.D. 760, which was possible taking into account the fact that she had long-lived parents, Lady Sak Biyaan was born about A.D. 700 or even earlier. I think that at that time Lady K'abal Xook was still able to give birth to a child. We have to remember that – for example – Lady Pakal had a child at the end of her child-bearing years, too. Thus, it seems quite possible that Lady Sak Biyaan was the daughter of Lady K'abal Xook and she was the elder half sister of Bird Jaguar IV, which certainly was not the best situation for Bird Jaguar IV and his claiming to the Yaxchilan throne.

**Lady Uh Joloom Chanil** is another mysterious person from Yaxchilan. She was considered to be the wife of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III because her name appears in the parentage statement of Bird Jaguar IV. In fact, we have no inscriptions from the reign of Itzmanaaj Bahlam III, telling us about her participation in any rites or events. And we have no inscriptions telling us about the designation of her son as the king of Yaxchilan. After acceding into rulership, Bird Jaguar IV tried to emphasize his parentage statement and started to prepare his great architectural programme. He is responsible for all inscriptions associated with his mother. He mentions her death on Lintel 59 (Structure 24). On Lintel 53 (Structure 55) we see Lady Uh Joloom Chanil with a bundle, standing in front of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III performing the ritual dance with the K'awiil sceptre in A.D. 697 (the retrospective inscription). On Lintel 32 (Structure 13) we see Lady Uh Joloom Chanil in a similar scene from A.D. 709 (probably a rite associated with the birth of Bird Jaguar

<sup>6</sup> It was assumed by Tate (1997:172) that this lintel was carved during the life of Bird Jaguar IV because the style and iconography are very similar to that of Lintel 33.

IV). On Stela 35 we find the information about the bloodletting and vision rites performed by Lady Uh Joloom Chanil in A.D. 741 (the retrospective inscription). Since we have no inscriptions associated with Lady Uh Joloom Chanil from the reign of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III, she cannot have been such an important person directly for that king, but, as she was a noble woman, she certainly could have played an important role at the royal court. We have a lot of examples of rulers' romances from all parts of the world. It is quite possible that Bird Jaguar IV had not been a lawful son and he needed ten years to prove his legitimacy to the throne of Yaxchilan.

It is worth noticing that Bird Jaguar IV acceded into rulership and ordered to have all the monuments mentioned above carved after the death of his mother. We can even speculate that he waited for that moment. The inscription from Stela 10 is the only example where Lady Uh Joloom Chanil is mentioned as Noble Lady of Calakmul (Figure 8). In other inscriptions she does not bear her title of origin. Taking into account the probable date of the erection of Stela 10 – A.D.766 – it seems very strange. At that time Calakmul was only a shadow of the earlier superstate. After the defeat by Tikal in A.D. 695 Calakmul was not such a powerful kingdom anymore. In this situation the titles borne by Lady Uh Joloom Chanil – *Ix Kaan Ajaw* and *Elk'in Kaloomte'* – do not make too much sense because over the years they lost their importance and prestige. But even if Calakmul at that time was not so powerful, its involvement in Yaxchilan may have been an attempt to return to its former glory. Calakmul certainly played an important role in the interregnum and the final success of Bird Jaguar IV to accede as *k'uhul ajaw* of Yaxchilan (Elisabeth Wagner, personal communication, 2008).



**Figure 8.** Stela 10, river side, lower inscription. The titles *Aj k'uhuun* and *Ix Kaan Ajaw* appear in the upper row at the second and third glyph blocks from the left, respectively; drawing by Tate (1992:232).

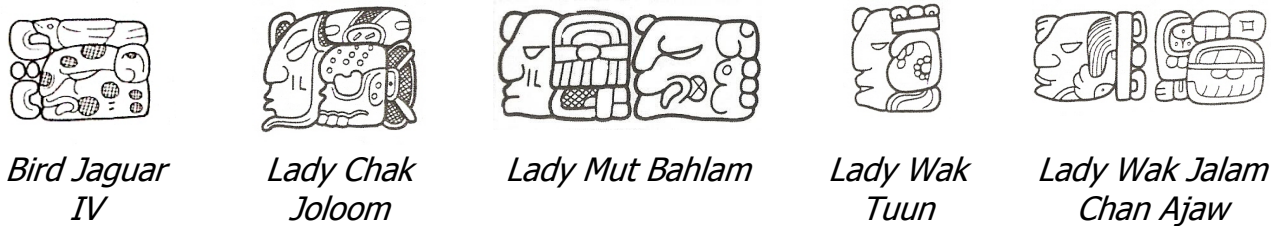
On the other hand, in all texts from Yaxchilan (cf. on Stelae 10, 35 and even on Stela 11, probably the most important monument to Bird Jaguar IV) Lady Uh Joloom Chanil bears the so-called "God C title" – *Aj k'uhuun*. We still do not know exactly the meaning of this special position at the Maya royal court and many interpretations have been suggested<sup>7</sup>. Recently Jackson and Stuart (2001:217-228) have suggested the reading "one who keeps, guards" or "one who obeys, venerates". These authors consider this title to be a non-regal term, carried by court members. In their opinion this title occurs with the names of social or political subordinates. The position of *Aj k'uhuun* was undoubtedly important, so Lady Uh Joloom Chanil could have been just one of the significant court members, but it does not mean that we should consider her to have been the "official" wife of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III.

<sup>7</sup> For example Lacandena (1996:46-49) proposed the translation as "Messenger". Coe and Kerr (1997:91) in their book translate this title as "He of the Holy Books".



## 2. Women of Bird Jaguar IV

Martin & Grube (2008:131) give us the names of four wives of Bird Jaguar IV: Lady Chak Joloom, Lady Mut Bahlam of Hix Witz and two women of Motul de San José: Lady Wak Tuun and Lady Wak Jalam Chan Ajaw (Figure 9).



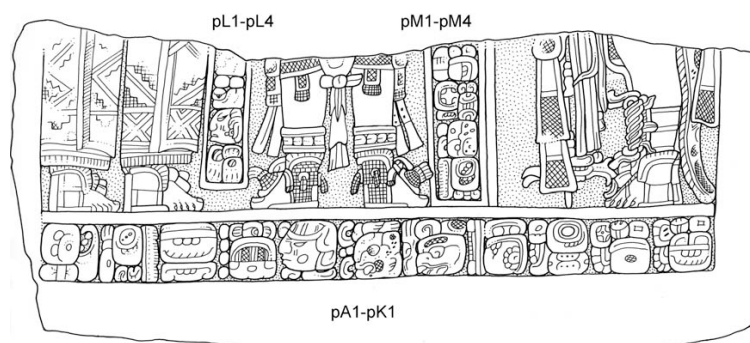
**Figure 9.** Name glyphs of Bird Jaguar IV and four women associated with him in inscriptions; drawings by Grube and Martin (2008:128,131).

**Lady Chak Joloom** was the mother of Chel Te' Chan K'inich – the future king of Yaxchilan. In this situation Bird Jaguar IV did not need other wives. His wife came from a strong and influential local family Joloom and Tate (1997:9) mentioned her as the only woman associated directly with Bird Jaguar IV. As Tate stated (1997:4) there were two very powerful families in Yaxchilan: Joloom and Bahlam. Josserand (2001:141) also pointed out the kind of continuing relationship reflected in the alternating Joloom and Bahlam names used by rulers of Yaxchilan. She suggests that Lady Chak Joloom came from the family of kings who held the name Joloom. It is interesting, because, although Bird Jaguar IV stressed his origin from the Bahlam family, he emphasized his association with members of the Joloom family and during his reign he tried to underline his good relations with them. The most important events were: the marriage to Lady Chak Joloom and the choice of her brother – Lord Chak Joloom as a regent of the young heir. As has been suggested by Josserand (2002:127), Structure 54 and probably Structure 2 belonged to the Joloom family. Those structures house lintels associated with the most important events in the life of Bird Jaguar IV and we have the Joloom family involved in these ceremonies. Lintel 54 (Structure 54) commemorates the celebration of Period Ending rites performed by Bird Jaguar IV and Lady Chak Joloom. On Lintel 57 (Structure 54) we have Lady Chak Joloom with Chel Te' Chan K'inich and on Lintel 58 (Structure 54) – Lord Chak Joloom and Chel Te' Chan K'inich. Lintel 9 (Structure 2) presents Bird Jaguar IV and Lord Chak Joloom performing the flapstaff dance. It is quite possible that Structure 20 (in the Main Plaza) was associated with the Joloom family, too. Structure 20 houses two lintels: Lintel 13 (depicting Bird Jaguar IV and Lady Chak Joloom during bloodletting and vision rites on the occasion of the birth of their son, Chel Te' Chan K'inich in A.D. 752) and Lintel 14 (depicting Lady Chak Joloom and her brother Lord Chak Joloom during the conjuring rite in A.D. 741, which seems to be a retrospective inscription). Another important step by Bird Jaguar IV was the collocation of earlier lintels (Lintels 60, 49, 37, 35, 36, 48, 47 and 34) in Structure 12, probably to focus on Ruler 10, the last of the earlier kings associated with the Joloom family. The next important event was the rededication of the Structure 22 (Chante' Suutz'), the house of Ruler 7 (from the Joloom family). That ritual took place only nine days after the accession of Bird Jaguar IV, so it must have been a very important event to him. The censuring of the house is described on Lintel 21, but Structure 22 houses more lintels (Lintels 18, 19, 20 and 22) with inscriptions that mention events associated with Ruler 7 and 10. Taking into account all that Bird Jaguar IV had done to emphasize his relation with the Joloom lineage, and the fact that Lady Chak Joloom and Lord Chak Joloom were closely related to Bird Jaguar IV, we can assume that probable other king's

marriages would not have been easily accepted by them.

It seems a little strange that Bird Jaguar IV could have had three more wives from the beginning of his reign or even before his accession. Moreover, he already had a heir. The three women (of Hix Witz and Motul de San José) were considered wives of Bird Jaguar IV only because their images and names are placed on the lintels in the scenes related to rituals. It is not a sufficient argument to treat them as wives because, in Maya text and imagery, above all on the painted ceramics, we find depictions and mentions of various women, who were not always kings' wives. They could have been as well dames at the royal court. We know that they came from noble families. If Bird Jaguar IV was depicted in the company of local sajal or lords from subordinate sites, he could as well has been depicted in the company of noble women, especially if he wanted to have good political relations with the cities of their origin. As Josserand states (2002:127) those women could have been only special female attendants. In my opinion they could have been the sajal's wives. We can be sure that lesser noble males married younger daughters or sisters of higher ranking men, because in this way their status could be emphasized and dynastic ties as well as political alliances be made and/or strengthened and confirmed.

Lady Mut Bahlam of Hix Witz seems to be closely related to sajal K'an Tok Wayib, perhaps Bird Jaguar IV's war chief. K'an Tok Wayib probably governed the site of Tixan. His name appears on Tixan, Lintel 1 (Figure 10), which represents Bird Jaguar IV, K'an Tok Wayib and two women (Houston et al. 2006). Only one woman is identified in the inscription. She is Lady Mut Bahlam of Hix Witz. Probably the other woman is Lady Chak Joloom. In my opinion, it is quite possible that here we have two men with their wives and that Lady Mut Bahlam of Hix Witz was the wife of K'an Tok Wayib and not a wife of Bird Jaguar IV. Even if K'an Tok Wayib governed the site of Tixan, he could have owned a house in Yaxchilan, as well. It seems quite possible that Structures 1 and 42 belonged to him and his family because he is mentioned on lintels from these structures. Lintel 6 depicts Bird Jaguar IV performing (in A.D.752) the so called *chakat*-staff-dance together with K'an Tok Wayib, named as his first sajal. At Lintel 7 we find Bird Jaguar IV performing (in A.D.752) the dance with the K'awiil sceptre in the company of a woman whose name in the inscription is badly eroded. We cannot establish her name but it is quite possible that she was Lady Mut Bahlam of Hix Witz. Lintel 8 represents a scene of taking captives by Bird Jaguar IV and K'an Tok Wayib (A.D.755). Lintel 42 depicts Bird Jaguar IV performing a dance and conjuring rite in the company of K'an Tok Wayib (A.D.752). Lintel 43 represents Bird Jaguar IV performing the dance with the *chakat*-staff in the company of Lady Mut Bahlam (A.D.752). If in fact these two structures were associated with K'an Tok Wayib, it is interesting that the lady of Hix Witz is mentioned in their inscriptions.



**Figure 10.** Tixan, Lintel 1; drawing by Houston (2006:3, fig.2)

We still have two women of Motul de San José, mentioned in the inscriptions at Yaxchilan: Lady Wak Tuun and Lady Wak Jalam Chan Ajaw. It seems rather impossible that Bird Jaguar IV took two wives from the same city. Of course, we do not know the family ties of these two women but they might have been sisters or a mother with her daughter. They might have been only women in the royal court or they might have been associated with other sajal. We can only suggest that one of them could have been the wife of Lord Chak Joloom. The interior wall of Structure 21 is adorned with a beautiful stucco relief, now badly damaged (Figure 11).



**Figure 11.** Structure 21, Yaxchilan with Stela 35 and the badly damaged stucco relief representing two men and three women; photo by author.

The scene represents five people: two men and three women. Schele and Freidel (2000:399) considered them to be: Itzamnaaj Bahlam III, Bird Jaguar IV, Lady K'abal Xook, Lady Uh Joloom Chanil and Lady Chak Joloom. On the other hand, it has been suggested by Tate (1997:97) that we have there: Bird Jaguar IV, Lord Chak Joloom, Lady Chak Joloom, Lady Mut Bahlam and one lady from Motul de San José. But in fact we cannot recognize the depicted people perfectly. It seems possible that the stucco relief represents Bird Jaguar IV, his mother Lady Uh Joloom Chanil (Structure 21 could have been dedicated to her because in front of it Stela 35 with her image had been placed), his wife Lady Chak Joloom, and maybe Lord Chak Joloom with his wife. Unfortunately we do not know which one of the noble women mentioned in the inscriptions could have been the wife of Lord Chak Joloom. There is still one candidate for a husband of one of the noble ladies recorded in the texts, another important person in Yaxchilán. Structure 33 houses three lintels associated with the accession of Bird Jaguar IV. On Lintel 3 we can see Bird Jaguar IV with his sajal – Aj Tza', Lord of K'ina. He probably was a very important person to Bird Jaguar IV because his image appears on one of the lintels of the most imposing structures.

### ***Conclusions***

The above considerations do not let us assume that polygamy was a customary phenomenon among Classic Maya kings. Above all, we have only few examples, not always sufficiently documented, which cannot confirm with certainty the polygamy of the Maya rulers. Royal courts were inhabited not only by the closest relatives of the king but

also by the local aristocracy and nobles descending from other friendly kingdoms, with many women among them. Scenes on the painted ceramics or the Bonampak murals depict many women, not only the rulers' wives. We can be sure that there were female attendants, women serving as companions to kings' wives or playing some special functions at the Maya court. If during the Late Classic period we find monuments representing noble men, it is also quite possible that noble women, for example wives of sajals could also have been depicted. On the other hand, if we find two women associated with a king, as in the cases of Caracol or Dos Pilas, we can assume that rulers had not necessarily two wives at the same time. In my opinion polygamy of kings could only have caused trouble. When taking more than one wife a king had to realize there would have been many children claiming their right to the throne and such a situation, of course, could raise problems inside the kingdom. Just the opposite, there is no doubt that each ruler was interested in its stability and progress. It is also interesting that in case of such important kingdoms as e.g. Calakmul, Tikal, Palenque or Piedras Negras we have no information on possible polygamy. I hope that future investigations will shed more light on this controversial problem which is still open to further discussion.

### ***Acknowledgments***

I am very grateful to Sven Gronemeyer and Elisabeth Wagner for their helpful remarks and discussion. I also thank Professor Nikolai Grube for reading the manuscript.

### ***References cited***

Coe, Michael, and Justin Kerr

1997 *The Art of the Maya Scribe*. Abrams, New York.

Culbert, Patrick T.

1996 Maya Political History and Elite Interaction. In *Classic Maya Political History. Hieroglyphic and Archaeological Evidence*, edited by T. Patrick Culbert, A School of American Research Book, Cambridge University Press.

Fahsen, Federico

2002 *Rescuing the Origins of Dos Pilas Dynasty: A Salvage of Hieroglyphic Stairway #2, Structure L5-49*. Electronic document, <http://www.famsi.org/reports/01098>.

Graham, Ian

1979 *Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions, vol.3, part 2, Yaxchilan*. Peabody Museum of Archeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

Gronemeyer, Sven

2006 *The Maya Site of Tortuguero, Tabasco, Mexico. Its History and Inscriptions*. Acta Mesoamericana, vol.17.

Houston, Stephen, Charles Golden, A. Rene Muñoz and Andrew K.Scherer

2006 *A Yaxchilan-style Lintel Possibly from the Area of Retatelco, Peten, Guatemala*. Research Reports on Ancient Maya Writing, Number 61. Electronic document, [http://www.utmesoamerica.org/pdf\\_meso/RRAMW61.pdf](http://www.utmesoamerica.org/pdf_meso/RRAMW61.pdf).

Jackson Sarah and David Stuart

2001 The *Aj k'uhun* Title. Deciphering a Classic Maya term of rank. *Ancient Mesoamerica* 12: 217-228.

Josserand, J. Kathryn

2002 Women in Classic Maya Hieroglyphic Texts. In *Ancient Maya Women*, edited by Traci Ardren, AltaMira Press, California, USA.

Lacadena, Alfonso

1996 A New Proposal for the Transcription of the A-K'u-na/A-K'u-HUN-na Title. *Mayab* 10: 46-49.

Landa, Diego De

1991 *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*. Editorial Dante S.A., Merida, Mexico.

Lounsbury, Floyd

1984 Glyphic Substitution: Homophonic and Synonymic. In *Phoneticism in Mayan Hieroglyphic Writing*, edited by John S. Justeson and Lyle Campbell, pp.167-184, Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, State University of New York at Albany, Publication 9.Albany.

MacLeod, Barbara

1997 The God N/Step Set in the Primary Standard Sequence. In Justin Kerr, *The Maya Vase Book, vol.2*.

MacLeod, Barbara and Dorie Reents-Budet

1994 The Art of Calligraphy: Image and Meaning. In *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*, edited by Dorie Reents-Budet with contributions by Joseph W.Ball, Ronald L. Bishop, Virginia M. Fields and Barbara MacLeod, Duke University Press, USA.

Maler, Teobert

1903 *Researches in the Central Portion of the Usumacintla Valley*. Memoirs of the Peabody Museum, vol.2, Number 2. Cambridge, Mass.

Martin, Simon and Nikolai Grube

2008 *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens*. Thames & Hudson, Second edition.

McAnany, Patricia A. and Shannon Plank

2001 Perspectives on Actors, Gender Roles, and Architecture at Classic Maya Courts and Households. In *Royal Courts of the Ancient Maya, vol.1.: Theory, Comparison and Synthesis*, edited by Takeshi Inomata and Stephen D. Houston, Westview Press, Colorado, USA.

Proskouriakoff, Tatiana

2001 Portraits of women in Maya Art. In *The Decipherment of Ancient Maya Writing*, edited by Stephen Houston, Oswaldo Chinchilla Mazariegos and David Stuart, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.

Schele, Linda and David Freidel

2000 *Una selva de reyes. La asombrosa historia de los antiguos mayas*. FCE, México.

Stuart, David and Stephen Houston

1994 *Classic Maya Place Names*. Studies in Pre-Columbian Art. and Archaeology, Number 33. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington D.C.

Tate, Carolyn E.

1997 *Yaxchilán. The Design of a Maya Ceremonial City*. University of Texas Press, Austin.

Webster David

2002 *The Fall of the Ancient Maya. Solving the Mystery of the Maya Collapse*. Thames and Hudson, London.