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DE L'UNIVERSITE JAGELLONNE DE CRACOVIE**

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REDACTION
Wojciech Blajer

CONSEIL EN REDACTION
Jan Chochorowski, Krzysztof Ciałowicz, Piotr Kaczanowski, Janusz K. Kozłowski,
Ewdoksia Papuci-Władyka, Jacek Poleski, Joachim Śliwa, Paweł Valde-Nowak

TRADUCTION
Piotr Godlewski, Romana Kielbasińska et auteurs des articles

SECRETAIRE DE LA REDACTION
Marcin S. Przybyła

ILLUSTRATIONS
Urszula Bąk, Elżbieta Pohorska-Kleja, Urszula Socha et auteurs des articles

MAQUETTE DE COUVERTURE
Jacek Poleski

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Wydawnictwo i Pracownia Archeologiczna "PROFIL" Magdalena Dzięgielewska

EN COUVERTURE
Trois figurines d'ivoire de site prédynastique de Tell el-Farkha

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Instytut Archeologii Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, ul. Gołębia 11, PL 31-007 Kraków
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Jarosław Żrałka

Terminal Classic occupation in the Maya sites located in the Triangulo Park area and the problem of their collapse¹

Supervisor:

Prof. Dr. Janusz K. Kozłowski, Instytut Archeologii, Uniwersytet Jagielloński, Kraków

Reviewers:

Prof. Dr. Robert Sharer, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

Prof. Dr. Mariusz Ziółkowski, Instytut Archeologii, Uniwersytet Warszawski, Warszawa

Dissertation of Jarosław Żrałka examines the cultural situation during the Terminal Classic period in the Triangulo National Park area, situated in the north-eastern part of Guatemala. The Park area has been investigated thoroughly since 1989 under the Triangulo Project. Triangulo Project research revealed copious evidence of Terminal Classic occupation, particularly in two centers, Nakum and Yaxhá, as well as at several smaller Maya sites. Data presented in dissertation shows that while some centres in the Triangulo Park area declined dramatically, many other Maya sites continued to grow culturally and demographically in the 9-th century, some even experiencing their apogee. Further, analysis of the archaeological data indicates that the Terminal Classic period in the Triangulo Park should be perceived as an era of fundamental political, cultural and economic changes; as a time

when the decline of powerful centres such as Tikal or Naranjo is accompanied by the rise of Nakum and Yaxha, new political powers which managed to survive the fall of their neighbors by 100 years or more. While the population of Yaxha was still stable, the population of Nakum continued to grow during this period. The centres experienced increased construction activity and a concentration of power during the Terminal Classic. These new Terminal Classic “winners” established new economic and political alliances and contacts with different Lowland Maya regions and sites still under development during the discussed period. Cultural contacts with these regions are reflected mainly in new architectural traits as well as new ceramics that appeared at Nakum and, to a lesser degree, at Yaxha during the Terminal Classic. The success of Nakum and Yaxha was partly possible probably due to access to water resources, and to important trade routes along the Holmul River.

Based on new archaeological excavations which were carried out in Nakum and Yaxha during last several years, it was possible to prove that Terminal Classic ceramics were

¹ Dissertation defence in 2005. The dissertation has been printed as a book: *Terminal Classic Occupation in the Maya Sites located in the Area of Triangulo Park, Peten, Guatemala*, Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 1299, Prace Archeologiczne, 62, Monografie, Kraków 2008, 268 pages.

in use at both sites at least from AD 800 and that we can date this period between approximately 800–900/950 and not between 850–950 as most archaeologists had assumed before.

By 950 all sites of the Triangulo Park were almost completely depopulated. In the subsequent Early Postclassic period small groups of people using different ceramics appeared at Nakum, Yaxha, El Bajon and other sites in the Triangulo Park area. However, the Postclassic people occupied the above-mentioned sites only after they had been abandoned by their original Classic inhabitants. We observe a similar resettlement process and cultural gap in Tikal, Copan and many other Southern Lowlands sites.

Data from Triangulo Park shows that overpopulation, degradation of the natural

environment and periodic droughts were reasons that probably led to the abandoning of Maya sites located in this area. These factors affected the political and economical situation in the Triangulo Park area and were responsible for the decline of major centres like Naranjo and many other smaller, secondary sites by 800 or 850. Nakum, Yaxha and smaller El Tigre managed to survive the demise of their neighbors by 100 years. Reasons for their decline were most probably the same as those that led to the early collapse of other Triangulo Park sites. Moreover, it might have been accelerated by the downfall of other sites located in the Northern Maya Lowlands which had cultural and probably economic contacts with Terminal Classic sites of the Triangulo Park.