

***Fashioning Tradition: Maya Huipiles in the Field Museum Collections.* Fieldiana: Anthropology, New Series No. 38. J. Claire Odland. Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 2006. 67 pp.¹**

Reviewed by Carol Hendrickson

The Field Museum of Natural History (FMNH) holds a sizeable collection of Guatemalan *traje* ('Maya clothing'), including 500 pieces of women's attire. J. Claire Odland focuses her study on 145 *huipiles* ('Maya blouses') collected between 1893 and 1995 from seven municipalities: Quetzaltenango, Chichicastenango, San Juan Comalapa, San Antonio Aguas Calientes, Santa María de Jesús, San Pedro Sacatepequéz, and Cobán. Drawing insights from the holdings of the Field Museum and other textile collections, published works, and field research in Comalapa and San Antonio Aguas Calientes between 1994-2005, the author has produced a museum monograph with twenty-two pages of text, seventy illustrations, and six pages of descriptions of the illustrations. Her aim is to analyze the huipiles in terms of the materials and technologies with which they were produced; the social, political, and economic dimensions of their use; and fashion changes that mark significant historical shifts. Given the ambitious nature of this project—topically, geographically, and temporally—it is no surprise that Odland touches only briefly on a vast range of topics.

The body of the text is divided into six sections. Odland presents a sketch of each of the seven municipalities and distinguishing characteristics of the huipiles from each of the different areas. Fashion trends in traditional wear and the social uses of *traje* are recurring themes, and these link to the second section where, in less than three pages, Odland describes various social characteristics and uses that can be signaled by Maya blouses (e.g., age, wealth, sexuality, and worldliness). She then considers the materials and technologies that figure in huipil production, including the subjects of design motifs and their meanings, and markets for *traje* sales. The final sections of the monograph outline some of the traditional activities of Maya women as well as changes in Guatemalan life that have been reflected in huipil design. Throughout the text, references to particular pieces are keyed to the photographs bound at the back of the volume.

Odland's work is most informative when she presents insights about particular pieces in the Field Museum collection (e.g., that "the oldest *huipil*... was a gift of the Government of Guatemala to the 1893 Chicago Colombian [sic] Exposition" [p. 8]). It is also a pleasure to see the images, and this work will surely serve to alert readers to the wealth of the Field Museum holdings. However, the length of the monograph is simply too short to do justice to the breadth of topics, and the author is often left making such gross generalizations that these fail to get at the complexity of situations and can even lead the reader astray. The author was also challenged to organize her narrative around sets of huipiles from so many regions and different time periods. The result is a good photographic record of a segment of the FMNH's huipil holdings but a very general account of their historical and cultural significance.

¹ Posted to the *Museum Anthropology* weblog March 9, 2007. See: <http://museumanthropology.blogspot.com/2007/03/fashioning-tradition-maya-huipiles-in.html>. Posted to *Museum Anthropology Review* March 10, 2007. © 2007 Carol Hendrickson.

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