

The main task of the project is to capture the ritual activity of Itza Maya related to the water environment. This key objective is to be achieved on the basis of data obtained during the archaeological underwater research within the Hospital Island (southern part of Lake Petén Itzá, northern Guatemala). The island is located north of the pre-Hispanic capital of the Itzas, which was Nojpeten (today's Flores Island).

Water, the element of the Maya sacred landscape, had a unique symbolic meaning for the members of this civilization - it was perceived as a medium through which the deceased crossed to the underworld. Water reservoirs were also perceived as places closely related to Chaak, rain deity, on which rainfall, and thus also harvest depended. It is not surprising that the Maya people gave him special attention by offering him many gifts. Hence a large number of various kinds of sacrificial gifts went to water reservoirs over the centuries. During the applicant's first research season – the preliminary reconnaissance in the southern part of Petén Itzá - a ceremonial place associated with a certain cult was most likely located within the Hospital Island. During the continuation of the research the applicant would like to conduct the studies that would enable the verification of this hypothesis. The character of the artefacts acquired during the reconnaissance indicates that it is highly probable that this hypothesis will be confirmed in the course of further research. The applicant would like to determine what kind of cult the area is related to and when it was used as a ritual place.

The research will consist of three stages. The first one will be the reconnaissance around the whole island. In places with a special archaeological potential, test excavations will be made to obtain information in which areas the comprehensive excavations should be carried out during the second stage of the project. During the realization of these two stages specialized research equipment such as side sonar (which will enable to study the character of the bottom of the water reservoir and the distance of artefacts from the surface of the lake) and airlift pump (which will allow moving silt and sediments from a given section of the lake bottom giving access to monuments lying below) will be used. The third stage will be laboratory work, which will include analyzes and documentation (including 3D documentation) of the acquired archaeological material.

The applicant undertook this research subject due to the significant importance of water in Maya beliefs and the great potential of the southern part of Lake Petén Itzá. What is more, taking this subject is important because no other type of study on the Maya culture will provide information that could be obtained by examining the bottom of the lake. The applicant has the appropriate skills and experience to carry out underwater research in the areas inhabited by the Maya and obtain data that cannot be accessed otherwise.

The first such comprehensive underwater research in the history in this area will help to understand the ritual activity which existed in the region and the cult connected with the water environment. As a result, it will enable to understand the vision of the universe of the indigenous communities living in the region over the centuries. Its exploration largely decides about the knowledge of a given social group and its customs, and it has an effect on knowing the cultural picture of the entire region.

On the basis of the material obtained underwater, it will allow to significantly complement the cultural picture which prevailed in the region over the centuries. It will be possible to collect a large quantity of data that has not been obtained so far, the lack of which results in an incomplete picture of the situation which prevailed in this region. According to the project's assumptions, the majority of finds will concern the cultural sphere, but it is likely that the information about the political and social situation will be obtained as well.