

ProgBlog

2012, No 2

“A futurist comments on the 2012 Maya prophecies”

By Michael Lee

*tzubtzjo:m uy-u:xlaju:n pik
chan ajaw u:x uni:w
uhto:m il[?]
ye'ni/ye:n bolon yokte'
ta chak joyaj.*

*It will be completed the 13th b'ak'tun.
It is 4 Ajaw 3 K'ank'in
and it will happen a 'seeing'[?].
It is the display of B'olon-Yokte'
in a great "investiture".*

Tortuguero Monument 6 Inscription (right panel)

Tabasco, Mexico - 7th century AD

(translated by Sven Gronemeyer and Barbara MacLeod, 2010)



Figure 1: Tortuguero Monument 6, Right Panel

Photo mosaic assembled by Paul Johnson (Van Stone 2010). Based on photographs by Donald Hales and Elisabeth Wagner. Reproduced in “What Could Happen in 2012” by Sven Gronemeyer and Barbara MacLeod.

As 21st December 2012 is a mere 13 weeks away, we are likely to hear much about the 2012 Maya prophecies between now and then. Many people will want to know what might happen on that day and why. Stripped of New Age and Hollywood embellishments, the Maya 2012 prophecy boils down to one simple fact. A whole age, or time period, on the Maya long-range astronomical calendar ends on or around 21 December this year. It is therefore a momentous milestone for Mayans because it concludes a long cycle of about 5,200 years in their Long Count calendar.

What is significant for the rest of the world is that the above inscription represents a very rare deep-future prophecy¹ by 7th century Mayans for a time in which we are living now. The evocative words inscribed on the Tortuguero Monument 6 (TRT Mon. 6)² in Tabasco in southernmost Mexico describe a future event fourteen centuries ahead of its time. That alone is culturally, philosophically and historically important.

Let's look closely at the wording of the prophecy, in the light of recent scholarly interpretations, in order to present an objective opinion on both its likely meaning and its implications for the coming winter solstice. Humanity will no doubt watch this date and time with keen interest. First, we need to briefly explain Mayan time-keeping systems.³ This extraordinary people have certainly nurtured a vast sense of history in their writings.

Mayans saw time as cyclical, determined by repetitive celestial and earthly patterns, especially the movements of our planet in relation to the sun, moon and solar system. They believed that repetitions of past cycles, both in the heavens and on earth, could provide the means to predict the future. In this sense they were pre-modern forecasters for whom the future was as real as the past.

Indeed, this was a civilisation obsessed with time. Divinity scholar Benedict (2011) points out that the Mayas may have had as many as 20 calendric cycles: "Each of these had their dedicated association with, for example, the cycles of Venus, other planets, the Moon, the Sun, the Earth, the span of human life, rituals, and the organization and planning of agriculture and other daily activities...the calendars provided the framework out of which the prophecies were given...the future was believed to be a repetition and variation of what had happened in the past...The foundation of Mayan prophecy is their cyclic concepts of time and history. Knowing what had occurred in a previous period enabled the prophets to indicate what was likely to recur."⁴

¹ "...we consider this to be a genuinely prophetic statement, albeit not one of either planetary catastrophe (we hope) or the usual humdrum offerings of incense and blood." "What Could Happen in 2012?" by Sven Gronemeyer and Barbara MacLeod, p. 23.

² Tortuguero (or El Tortuguero) is an archaeological site in which supported a Maya city during the Classic period.

³ Their *Tun* year was made up of 18 months, each lasting 20 days, giving 360 days. The start date of the *Tun* year was the December winter solstice. Each of the 18 months was given a name, a number, a glyph and a special meaning or association. The *Tzolk'in* calendar was made up of a 20-day week cycled 13 times to give a period of 260 days. (In Mayan mythology there are 13 heavens and 13 is a core mythological number.) This was regarded as a sacred cycle and was used to organize agriculture and to plan family and religious events. The Maya also plotted the course of time in 20 year cycles – the *katum* – and on a larger scale of 400 year periods called *baktuns*.

⁴ Benedict, G. 2011. *The Mayan Prophecies for 2012*. London: Watkins Publishing.

In their elaborate time-keeping system, Mayans used a structured hierarchy of time units. *Katuns* were 20 year cycles. *Baktuns* were 400 year periods. Since 13 was a sacred number for Mayans (from their 13 mythological heavens), each “Sun” cycle, or world age, was made up of 13 *baktuns*, or 5,200 years long (13 x 400). Five Suns, or ages, made up, in turn, a longer cycle of 26,000 years. The Mayans, as you can see, thought in extended time cycles – their *pictun*, for example, equalled 20 *baktuns* and their *alautun* was measured in millions of years.

The Mayan Long Count calendar was based on the Five Suns or world ages of 5,200 year-long periods each. These ages were growth cycles and they are still believed to go on indefinitely: after one ends, a new one begins.

21st December 2012 (written by the Mayans in the format 13:0:0:0:0⁵) heralds the end of the current world age. According to Wikipedia, the Long Count's "zero date" was set at 11 August 3114 BC in Gregorian calendar.⁶ That’s a heck of a long time ago!

Now that we have a sense of long-range Mayan time-keeping, we can better understand the wording of the 7th century TRT Mon.6 prophecy. It focuses on what will happen when this current time period, or world age, ends. An exhaustive analysis of the prophecy has been carried out on the back of recent discussions in 2009-2010 between Maya scholars and epigraphers and recorded in a 2010 paper by Sven Gronemeyer and Barbara MacLeod entitled “What could happen in 2012: a re-analysis of the 13-B'ak'tun Prophecy on Tortuguero Monument 6”. These scholars definitely believe that the TRT Mon.6 prophecy refers to 2012, *not* to a contemporaneous 7th century event: “...we do not interpret that [investiture of Bolon Yokte’ K’uh] as a seventh-century celebration, but rather one intended for 2012.”⁷

Having established the relevance of the prophecy for 2012, let’s study its three key elements:

- The future reference to a completion of a time cycle on the 13th b'ak'tun
- That there will be a “seeing” or witnessing at this time
- That there would be a religious ceremony involving the “investiture” of the Mayan deity called B'olon-Yokte'

⁵ This format represents the following sequence of time units in descending order: Baktun, katun, tun, winal and kin.

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2012_phenomenon

⁷ “What Could Happen in 2012” Sven Gronemeyer and Barbara MacLeod, p.35.

The change of a whole age, taking place this very winter solstice, would have been expected by this civilisation to be accompanied by some celestial or earthly disturbances. Examples could include especially intense solar flares, volcanic eruptions or floods. More importantly, the prophecies are interpreted by some contemporary Mayans and New Age followers to signal a time in which some sort of change in spiritual consciousness may become possible as befits the beginning of a new age to follow. That idea seems to be in keeping with the TRT Mon.6 inscription which points towards some sort of spiritual insight (a “seeing” or witnessing) associated with a religious ceremony investing a deity with powers at the transition of ages.

Although the Mayan 2012 prophecy does not predict the end of the world and is essentially about the end of a calendar age, whose importance is primarily to do with a major milestone in historical time-keeping, that is not quite the end of the mystery. Another key element in the wording of this deep future prophecy is that the deity appointed to oversee the transition of ages happens to be a god of war and destruction: “...we have direct evidence that Bolon Yokte’ K’uh is a deity of both war and transition (Eberl & Prager 2005), and as such, he apparently attacks and destroys the supports (pawahtu:n) which hold up the sky (Carl Callaway, w.c., 18th Aug 2009)... One cannot help but wonder how the seventh-century Maya anticipated this investiture, given the evidence that this god specializes in mass destruction. Might this be the stuff capitalised on serendipitously by Roland Emmerich and the 2012 doomsayers?”⁸

So, the deity of transition in the 2012 prophecy is warlike, destructive. The 7th Century Mayan prophet looked towards a new age far into the future (which we live in now) and recorded a wish that it would be inaugurated with a “proper and perhaps precarious ritual observation”.⁹ Such transitions of world ages were looked upon soberly by the Mayans because there was invariably a cycle of destruction of the old preceding the creation of the new. This is exactly how contemporary Mayan elders in Guatemala today see the end of this age:

“According to the Maya Calendars we are living in the time of the 13 Baktun and 13 Ajau. This is a time that comes accompanied with great pain. We are seeing a series of events approaching us as never seen before, these events come charged with tremendous sufferings and pain. They will happen in different places. They will touch us equally, men and women, old and young, indigenous or non-indigenous.

⁸ “*What Could Happen in 2012*” Sven Gronemeyer and Barbara MacLeod, p.40, p.32.

⁹ “*What Could Happen in 2012*” Sven Gronemeyer and Barbara MacLeod, p.40.

“All this is due to the contamination. The atmosphere has lost its control. We the Maya see it with much sadness that we will see hunger and drought. Plagues will invade the fields and affect the agriculture; new illnesses will appear and will be difficult to cure. The sun rays are getting stronger and stronger as time goes by. Our recommendation to avoid more suffering is this: No more nuclear testing, no more wars, no more mining and other explorations, no more use of chemicals. This is the only way the human race, the animals and the ancient trees could survive and see the new Sun*. If we do not change, few will be the ones to survive and see the arrival of the 6th Sun.”¹⁰

These searing and far-reaching words from 2011 are entirely consistent with the message of the 7th century prophecy we are analysing. Again, this is a significant cultural and historical phenomenon because the words of the Guatemalan Mayan leader could themselves be construed as a contemporary prophetic Mayan message for our times.

More importantly, this message from today’s Mayan leaders confirms a sense deeply instilled in this people’s consciousness across the centuries that there is, indeed, a deep-seated crisis accompanying the end of the age we are currently living in.

In the address, the elders speak of great pain and suffering arising from pollution, land degradation, climate change and disease. The 2012 Mayan prophecies are not about cosmic disasters but about ecological, environmental, economic and social problems that will cause famine, disease and hardship for humanity. Are the problems which led to the collapse of the classical Mayan civilisation, whereby over 90% of its population disappeared after A.D.800,¹¹ going to repeat themselves on a global scale? Is that what the 7th century prophet foreshadows in the TRT Mon.6 prophecy? The Mayan elders of today certainly think so.

I believe NASA has put the record straight regarding possible celestial disturbances happening at this year’s winter solstice. Many of us have become aware of increased solar flare activity over the last 18 months or so, but NASA assures us on their website that this is all part of the sun’s typical 11-year solar cycle and that solar flares are expected to increase up to the next solar maximum expected late in 2013. Since solar activity of this kind can crash computer and electronic systems, this may alarm folks already nervous about the 21st December date. In fact, NASA is downplaying any connections between celestial events and this date, stating categorically: “There are no credible predictions for worrisome astronomical events in 2012.”

¹⁰ Address to the world by the National Council of Elders Mayas, Xinca and Garifuna, by Wakatel Utiw, “Wandering Wolf,” Cirilo Perez Oxlaj Mayan Council of Elders, Antigua, Guatemala. “The Maya finally speak up about the meaning of 2012.” April 8th, 2011 - <http://www.shiftoftheages.com/national-mayan-council-elders> It is interesting to note that the Mayan Council of Elders do not see December 21, 2012 as the end of their calendar. A new “Sun”, or age, represents the beginning of a new Long Count cycle in the calendar system of approximately 5,200 years, which may not happen for many years.

¹¹ Diamond, J. 2005. *Collapse*. p.172.

Nor do NASA's scientists see anything special in the planetary alignment has been highlighted in New Age interpretations of Mayan prophecies: "There are no planetary alignments in the next few decades, Earth will not cross the galactic plane in 2012...Each December the Earth and Sun align with the approximate center of the Milky Way Galaxy but that is an annual event of no consequence."¹²

This may be true but the fact that the Mayas, using only the naked eye, could observe and record the movements of the sun, moon and other planets with such accuracy that they could correctly predict the nature and timing of the alignment of the earth and sun with the centre of the galaxy shows extraordinary insight and foresight for a so-called primitive people living close to nature. I have huge respect for their devout, "low-tech" astronomy and time-keeping systems. I also respect the fact that this is a people who underwent cataclysmic collapse of their civilisation and have insights into how societies can rise and fall if they are not harmoniously aligned with the heavens.

Today's Mayan elders are reported to be angry about the way in which the Western media are interpreting their body of ancient prophecies to suit sensationalist agendas and they categorically do not advocate any end of the world scenarios on 21 December this year. Nevertheless, they expect great pain and suffering to accompany the transition of the ages they forecast fourteen centuries ago and it is to this aspect of their message to which we must give the most credence.

In conclusion, here's what I expect to happen. Firstly, there will be a variety of religious and esoteric ceremonies at sunrise on that day, both Mayan and New Age, at traditionally sacred locations from Guatemala and Mexico to Stonehenge, all watched by the world's media and curious bystanders. And secondly, there will be intense astronomical and astrological activity, before, during and after this date to observe and interpret any unusual celestial occurrences. But there will be no falling comets, asteroids, meteorites nor any tsunamis, volcanoes or other catastrophic events to signal the end of this Mayan age. That's because 21 December 2012 is a symbolic date, a significant calendric and time-keeping event, rather than a cosmic event.

That is why I forecast a "Y2K" type anti-climax on the day.

¹² "2012 – A Scientific Reality Check" by Don Yeomans, NASA senior research scientist - <http://www.nasa.gov/topics/earth/features/yeomans20091110.html> - see also http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/sunearth/news/News030712-X5-4.html.

But that is not to say we need to dismiss the Mayan 2012 prophecy as irrelevant or some kind of hoax. Despite the barbarism of their practice of human and child sacrifice, vividly portrayed in Mel Gibson's movie *Apocalypto*, the Mayans developed a sophisticated, knowledge-based, numerate civilisation with complex and powerful time-keeping methods and deep insights into planetary cycles. Its collapse has mystified and fascinated the human race for centuries, just like the sinking of the Titanic has captivated millions since that tragedy. Yet the Mayans have survived. These people have made a huge contribution to the history of the human race and we would be foolish to ignore what can be learnt from their historical experience and wisdom which we can apply for this, and future, generations.

Although I expect a quiet day on 21st December 2012, I will certainly pay my respects to the Mayans as an age that has lasted over 5,000 years for them draws to an end, and they begin a new calendar. Furthermore, I can see an eerie commonality between the Mayan view of creative destruction as ages come and go and Joseph Schumpeter's doctrine of creative destruction in the economy. I believe it is on the ecological and economic levels that a global crisis does, in fact, exist at this time. Coincidence? Or was a dire aspect of our own times correctly foreshadowed by the prophet who inscribed TRT Mon.6?

We will never know. But as 13:0:0:0 draws near, may we use this historic cultural milestone to pause and look backwards and forwards at the same time, just as the Mayans did in their cyclical view of life: backwards to a deeply imaginative and fallen civilisation, but forwards to ways of solving the global environmental, economic and cultural problems which the Mayans, better than any other race, know can turn into cataclysms for human society.

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