

The Mayan Calendar and its End Date

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The "Mayan Calendar," which has been called the Long Count by archaeologists and historians of the Maya for a century now, is the large-scale version of the 260-day astrological calendar of ancient Mesoamerica. It is composed of 260 katuns, each of which contain 7,200 days. The Long Count has anchor points; the starting point is in 3114 BC and the ending point in 2012 AD. It is, however, only one fifth of a much larger cycle, the precession of the equinoxes, and its beginning and ending should probably be considered transition points and not originations or terminations of any kind.

For nearly a century researchers struggled with the precise location in time of the base date for the Long Count. But during the 1970's and 80's, a majority of investigators in several fields came to accept a proposal that was supported by many facts. This proposal, more exactly a correlation with the Western calendar, has come to be known as the Goodman-Martinez-Thompson correlation, the G.M.T. It is named for the three men who settled on the same Julian date number for the base date of the Long Count - Julian day #584,283. This correlation (generally given as plus or minus two days) is backed up by ancient stone inscriptions, historical astronomical data, colonial writings, and the oral traditions of the most conservative Maya in Guatemala and Mexico. Today, nearly all researchers have accepted Julian Day #584,283 which corresponds to August 11, 3114 B.C.(which is the same as August 11, -3113) to be the start date for the Long Count.

Despite the widespread acceptance of this established date, a large number of people have been misled in regard to the timing of the 260-day calendar and the Long Count. The writer and charismatic new age leader Jose Arguelles, one of the people behind the Harmonic Convergence of 1987 and the man who invented Dreamspell, has promoted some very questionable ideas about this aspect of Maya culture. Arguelles is a fantastic artist and master of tech-speak, but he is no astrologer and is certainly not sensitive to the facts about the Long Count. In his book "The Mayan Factor," Arguelles explains his belief that the "Mayan Calendar" is a kind of code that predicts contact with galactic beings. While this is an intriguing idea, it is far from factual. His calendar correlation, which has led to much confusion on this issue, is very strange indeed and does not fit with the known facts.

Jose Arguelles and the followers of his product "Dreamspell" use a calendar correlation that ignores leap year and thus loses one day every four years. Between 2000 and 2004 it differed from the GMT by 50 days. Between 2004 and 2008 it will differ by 49 days. The fact that many people continue to use this correlation and actually perform what are basically astrological readings for others is, in my opinion, testimony to the flexibility of the human mind and its capacity for self-deception. However, since no one has done a serious study comparing psychological profiles with interpretations from the various calendar correlations, one must rely on common sense when choosing which one to use. In the opinion of a number of unbiased practitioners, the GMT works much better than the Dreamspell correlation and it is based on real data.

On a much vaster scale, the Long Count measures the precession of the equinoxes, a cycle of approximately 25,695 years. Western astrology divides this period into twelfths, each one being an age named for the constellation in which the Vernal Equinox is located. The Long Count is a 5,125-year period that is one fifth of the full precession cycle, and it is a period that turns out to contain nearly all of human oral and written history. In Mesoamerican myth, there are five great ages, each one ending with a collapse of some sort. According to some Mesoamerican myths, we are living today in the last years of the fifth and last age, the closure of a full cycle that is composed of five segments of the precession cycle. Given the simple technology available to them, the ancient Mesoamerican astrologer/astronomers did some amazing work. Not only did they pinpoint the length of the precession cycle, but they also anchored

it with a remarkable alignment, the meeting of the winter solstice point with the plane of the Milky Way, the equator-like plane that runs through the center of our galaxy. While this plane also passes through the galactic center, the precession of the Earth's orbit will not align precisely with the galactic center itself.

The Long Count has several layers of subdivisions. The major divisions into 260 katuns (of 7,200 days) and 13 baktuns (of 144,000 days) are blocks of time that appear to have an astrological value, though much of the original understanding has been lost or destroyed. What we do know is that the cornerstone of Mesoamerican astrology is the 260-day astrological calendar. The Long Count, with its 260 katuns, appears to be simply a large-scale, mundane version of the 260-day astrological count. With this understanding we can speculate as to how these time-structures may have shaped the past and how they may shape the future. For example, we are presently in the last katun of the entire Long Count.

The so-called "end of the Mayan calendar" in 2012 is both the end point of the current fifth part of the precessional cycle and the terminal point of the entire precession cycle itself. Like the recent Millennium, prognostications abound as to what will happen. I don't think this time passage marks the end of days. After all, December 21, 2012, only marks the beginning of a new cycle of the precession of the winter solstice relative to the dark band in the Milky Way. For the Maya, this band was the portal to the underworld, the region from which humanity originated. In the context of Maya mythology, this dark band has to be the most important anchor point in the entire precession cycle. Western astrologers may prefer a more precise galactic alignment. If you are looking for the point when the winter solstice point aligns exactly with the galactic equatorial plane itself, then look behind you – this alignment occurred during 1997-98. The nearest the winter solstice point gets to the galactic center occurs two centuries from now.

The Long Count appears to predict a turning point in human history. Even without this remarkable astro-calendrical system it is clear that this is the case. Humanity is at war with nature, we are over-populating and soiling our nest, and we are fighting over increasingly scarce resources. Surely we will pay the price for this abuse of our Mother over the course of the next century, if not sooner in 2012.