

# December 21, 2012: Some Rational Deductions

by John Major Jenkins

In November 2007, the *IMS* published an article about the 2012 phenomena in which John Major Jenkins commented on statements made by Maya scholar Susan Milbrath in a 2012 article previously published in *USA Today*. Susan responded to John's comments in an article we published in our December 2007 issue. Now, read on as Jenkins continues the discourse.



I appreciate Susan Milbrath's thoughts on Maya astronomy, and hope our exchange will inform and inspire the investigations of others. The citation I provided off the top of my head for Jean Meeus's calculation of the solstice alignment with the galactic equator was indeed incorrect. It's not on page 216 of *Mathematical Astronomy Morsels* (1997) as stated, but pages 301-2 of that book.

Milbrath clarifies her intent in the quotation that I had misread from the somewhat unclear phrasing of the *USA Today* journalist. Instead of stating that it would have been impossible for the ancient Maya to know about precession, she means it would have been impossible for them to have been aware of the galactic alignment of era-2012 with the level of accuracy she believes I require. Here, however, she mistakenly imputes that I require a level of precision that I do not. The confusion seems to arise from my use of precise astronomical terminology to define what the galactic alignment is. I define the galactic alignment as the alignment of the

December solstice sun with the galactic equator.

## An Alignment Zone?

Based on Meeus's precise calculation for the galactic alignment occurring in 1998, and the fact that the sun is roughly one-half of a degree wide, I pointed out that it is reasonable to think of this alignment as a "zone" stretching from 1980 to 2016 (36 years equals one-half of a degree of precessional motion). I then observed the fact that the 13-Baktun cycle ending date falls within this range. In the early 1990s, I took this more generalized situation of "being in the zone" not as a definitive proof of my alignment thesis, but as an indicator of possible intent on the part of the Long Count's creators, and a suggestion that it might be worthwhile to rationally investigate the topic further.

## An Anthony Aveni Challenge

I think that my use of a scientifically accurate definition of the galactic alignment has been conflated with

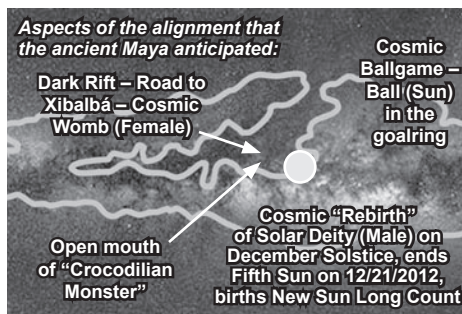
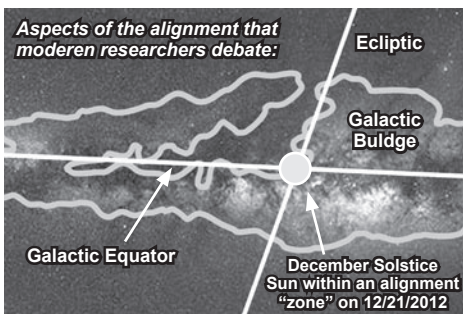
what ancient Maya naked eye star gazers would have been, and could have been, looking at. To use the term "galactic equator" in a scientifically precise definition of the galactic alignment does not mean that the ancient Maya star gazers utilized the exact same scientific concept that modern astronomers do. It does not logically follow. Thus, Anthony Aveni's challenge (in a *New York Times* article of July 1, 2007) to demonstrate a Maya awareness of the galactic equator simply misses the point. I neither assume this nor state this in my investigation of ancient Maya astronomy.

What is significant, however, is that certain astronomical features that are compelling to the naked eye are involved in the galactic alignment (the Milky Way, the dark rift in the Milky Way, the cross formed by the Milky Way and the ecliptic, and the sun) and are very important players in the Maya Creation Myth. It should also be emphasized, as I've frequently stated in my published work since the mid-1990s, that the Milky Way itself, and more narrowly, the dark rift in the Milky Way, would have served the ancient naked-eye astronomers as the target for the galactic alignment rather than the abstract dotted line known to astronomers as the galactic equator.

## A Conceptual Awareness

Another assumption that frequently occurs should be clarified. Instead of honing in on the ancient Maya's observational and calculational methodology and assuming a high level of precision, my approach to demonstrating 2012 as being intentionally placed proceeds along different lines. (I'm sure that progressive scholars will one day identify precessional interval mechanisms in the dated hieroglyphic corpus, as well as models of how precessional ideology relates to kingship and other much-discussed features

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**Editor's note:** The discussion centers around whether the ancient Maya were really as aware as we are today of the Galactic Equator (the imaginary line marking the arc of the Milky Way Galaxy). We do know they were aware of the arc of the ecliptic (pathway of the movements of the sun, moon and planets) and they calculated the 12/21/2012 end-date of their Long Count calendar to when the sun would appear to "enter" the Dark Rift. It is here from our view from earth, that the darkness of interstellar dust clouds looks like the open mouth of a "crocodilian monster" – this is their Road to the Underworld. It is the most important Maya creation place. And even if the Maya were not aware that +/-26,000 light years "behind" this very area of the sky is the center of our galaxy, researchers now agree that they sure chose the exact correct spot and time – and they encoded this astronomical alignment in their Creation Myth for us to interpret.