

Scholars and 2012 as the Dawn of a New Era

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Tomás Barrientos, Director of the Department of Archaeology and the Center for Archaeological and Anthropological Research at the Universidad del Valle, Guatemala (and archaeologist for the La Corona project in Guatemala, PRALC), gave a presentation about “2012” at OAS (The Organization of the American States) in Washington D.C. on October 2, 2012. It was a conference explicitly dedicated to the 2012 question, titled:

XLIV OAS Policy Roundtable:

“The 13 Mayan Bak'tun: The End of an Era and the Dawn of Another”

Date: October 2, 2012 - 10:30 AM

Place: Hall of the Americas, OAS main Building Washington D.C.



It should be noted that the title itself reflects my own position on 2012, which has been ridiculed by my critics and twisted into a dubious advocacy for “New Age thinking.” The title expresses 2012 as the Dawn of a New Era. Sure, that’s a reasonable and sensible reading of what 2012 would have meant to the ancient Maya, and I’ve laboriously laid out and endlessly repeated the evidence and arguments for this position since the mid-1990s. It’s important that we now have concurrence in this colloquium of the Organization of the American States, with scholars from the University of Boston and the Universidad del Valle, Guatemala. Professor Barrientos holds a position on 2012 that in *many* respects echoes my own, which I’ve presented at many academic institutions including the SAA (2010), the Institute of Maya Studies (in 1997 and 2011), at the Universidad del Valle (Tapachula, in 2007), the Universidad Francisco Marroquin (Antigua, in 2007), in Tikal (2008), Belize (2008) and Copan (2012), and several conferences and presentations in Antigua (2003, 2007, 2008, 2012) — just to focus on my Central American events.

Francisco Estrada-Belli also gave a talk (I spoke with him in Antigua in 2012). He emphasized the Guatemalan origin of the calendars in the pre-Classic Peten; the important developments at Izapa in Mexico, beginning around 400 BC, were not mentioned. Their talks are posted online at: http://www.oas.org/en/media_center/videos.asp?sCodigo=12-0180&videotype=09&sCollectionDetVideo=5.

Professor Barrientos expressed the following ideas about 2012:

- The Maya did not think about 2012 as the end of the world
- Their knowledge expressed in their calendars and philosophy was profound
- The doomsday / end of the world idea comes from the preoccupation of our own, European-based culture
- The end of the world idea is also projected onto 2012 from Christian assumptions
- The Maya concept for 2012 involves cycles, observing the cycles in nature

- When 13 Baktuns is reached it cycles back to zero. A completion of 13 Baktuns then returns the count to zero, the dawn of a New Era.
- The modern Maya still do ceremonies and have a ritual continuity with their Classic Period ancestors
- 2012 is a time of opportunity for change
- 3114 BC is associated with the astronomy of the hearthstones in Orion
- The 2012 date was found at La Corona, discovered by the PRALC in April of 2012

Barrientos did not discuss Tortuguero Monument 6. He did not directly argue or adduce his ideas about 2012 from evidence on the La Corona “2012” text, which he mentions toward the end of his talk. The ideas are expressed as common sense conclusions from having a good understanding of Maya calendars, cosmology, and time philosophy, including the surviving traditions among the modern Maya.

His core ideas completely echo my own ideas about 2012, expressed since 1994 through many books, presentations, and interviews: A cyclic return to the beginning and the commencement of a New Era, an opportunity for change when the Maya do ceremonies. (Here, I’d emphasize that, according to Maya ritual thinking, the era renewal *must* be facilitated by the performance of ceremonies, offerings, and sacrifices.) To the Maya, 2012 is not about the end of the world, which comes from the assumptions of Christianity and European conceptions. Barrientos did not depict the astronomy of 2012, that of the sun positioned at the Crossroads, but he did point out the Orion hearth-stones associated with the *previous* 13-Baktun completion, in 3114 BC. However, the astronomical parallelism between the 2012 alignment at the Crossroads and the solar passage through the zenith crossroads, which is the astronomical aspect of my reconstruction work, went unnoticed.

In any case, it’s great that we have this affirmation of the work I’ve done to reconstruct and express how the ancient Maya would have thought about 2012. It does remain an odd and unfortunate circumstance that my work was either ignored or reviled by academia, so this concurrence with my work, expressed at this conference in Washington D.C. in October of 2012, should be seen as a signal event. And it’s not an isolated occurrence, as other scholars have (wittingly or unwittingly) have concurred with my pioneering ideas, in affirming that 2012 was conceived by the Maya as a world-renewal (a “cosmogogenesis”), an era transition, a Great Return, a renewal attended by deity sacrifice, and a cyclic repetition parallel to 3114 BC. These expressions came from scholars late in the game, in journal articles published in 2011 and 2012, some 22 years after I’d first discussed 2012 (in my 1989 book *Journey to the Mayan Underworld*).

Francisco Estrada-Belli, Professor at the Department of Archaeology, Boston University, gave a talk called “The Beginning of the Maya Civilization and its Calendar in Peten, Guatemala.” The pre-Classic site of Cival has eastern alignments to the June and December solstices and the zenith passage dates. He discussed the Waxactun (zenith, equinox, and solstice) alignments too. Cross forms, quincunx, ritual burials, gods of rain. Corn at the center, the *axis mundi* (Palenque tree; with three levels of the cosmos along the axis = underworld, earth, sky). A profound integrated cosmology with sacred ritual, economics, politics. But he doesn’t address the 15° N division of the year into 260- and 105-day intervals (the probable Tzolk’in origin), and the August 12 solar zenith-passage associated with 3114 BC in the Long Count — which highlights the latitude of Izapa.

Note: I discovered these conference videos, and the fact of the conference, in June of 2014.