

New Discoveries at the Maya Observatory in Chichén Itzá

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Back in the 1990s, my research on Chichén Itzá reconstructed something astounding and previously unrecognized about the famous “Castillo,” the Pyramid of Kukulcan. This is the pyramid that many visit on the March equinox, to witness a spectacular hierophany. As the sun sets, a shadow is cast along the northern stairway to create an image of a descending serpent, with its stone head at the bottom of the stairs. It appears to be slithering off to the nearby cenote.

This is a fascinating architectural and cosmological achievement of the Maya, symbolizing the return of Kukulcan, the Plumed Serpent. But I noticed something else in the symbolism of this event, pointing to something much more profound. To be brief, I synthesized pieces of evidence to reconstruct how the serpent’s tail points up through the center of the pyramid, into the zenith of the sky. The rattle on the tail is called “tzab” in the Yucatec language, which is the word for the Pleiades. The *Crotalus durissus* king snakes in Yucatan often have a little circular design near the rattle, with three dots, and this emulates the Ahau “sun face” of the solar lord. The two elements thus look like a king’s face topped by a rattle-crown.

All of these elements together (and more) allowed me to reconstruct a hidden esoteric meaning of the equinox shadow-serpent. It was indicating a time when the Sun and the Pleiades would be aligned in the zenith, the exact center of the sky overhead. The fact is that such a convergence defines a rare era of the precession of the equinoxes: the 21st century. I repeat: The Pyramid of Kukulcan at Chichén Itzá is a precessional star-clock in stone, pointing to a rare celestial alignment that culminates in our current century. My work here is as striking, if not more striking, than my 2012 galactic alignment reconstruction for which I am better known. I reconstructed not one, but two precession-tracking methods that the Maya used. My Sun-Pleiades-Zenith reconstruction arose alongside the other work and was published in a magazine article of 1996 and in my 1998 book *Maya Cosmogenesis 2012*.

Alignments of pyramids and symbolic architecture in a carefully designed sacred space that points to a specific era of the precession of the equinoxes? Yes, and this is the kind of thing we’ve seen other researchers propose for the Egyptian pyramids. Here, among the Maya, the methods were completely different. There was no precedent for my reconstruction, although most of the pieces were there, ready to be integrated. In the Egyptian breakthroughs, there were previous clues about the so-called air shafts pointing to stellar alignments (Badaway / Trimble, 1964), a hint about the belt stars of Orion reflecting the pyramids (Artaud, 1940s), and the unusual water erosion suggesting the Sphinx’s great antiquity (de Lubicz, 1950s, as John Anthony West recounts in *Serpent in the Sky*, 1979).

I wanted to sketch these astounding yet often overlooked aspects of Chichén Itzá’s pyramid science and lost knowledge, before I launch into another breakthrough at Chichén Itzá. I worked this out in late 2014 and early 2015, and wrote a detailed essay

about it.. Since early 2015 it has been freely available as the “featured new breakthrough” essay on *The Center for 2012 Studies* website, a think-tank which I manage.

For travelers and students of Maya culture who have visited the great Maya city of Chichén Itzá in Mexico, the Caracol Observatory stands out as a striking sight.



Figure 1. The Caracol Observatory at Chichén Itzá

Not exactly a pyramid, it has a round tower with windows for viewing celestial events, and a stairway on the west side with a curious channel running right down the middle of it. At the back of the channel is a stone column, and above that is a carved circular disk and a panel covered in hieroglyphs (see Figure 2). The panel is the front edge of a platform, and a king could stand there to gaze out to the distant western horizon. The channel that divides the stairway in half points to the sunset position on the solar zenith-passage days at Chichén Itzá (May 20-25).

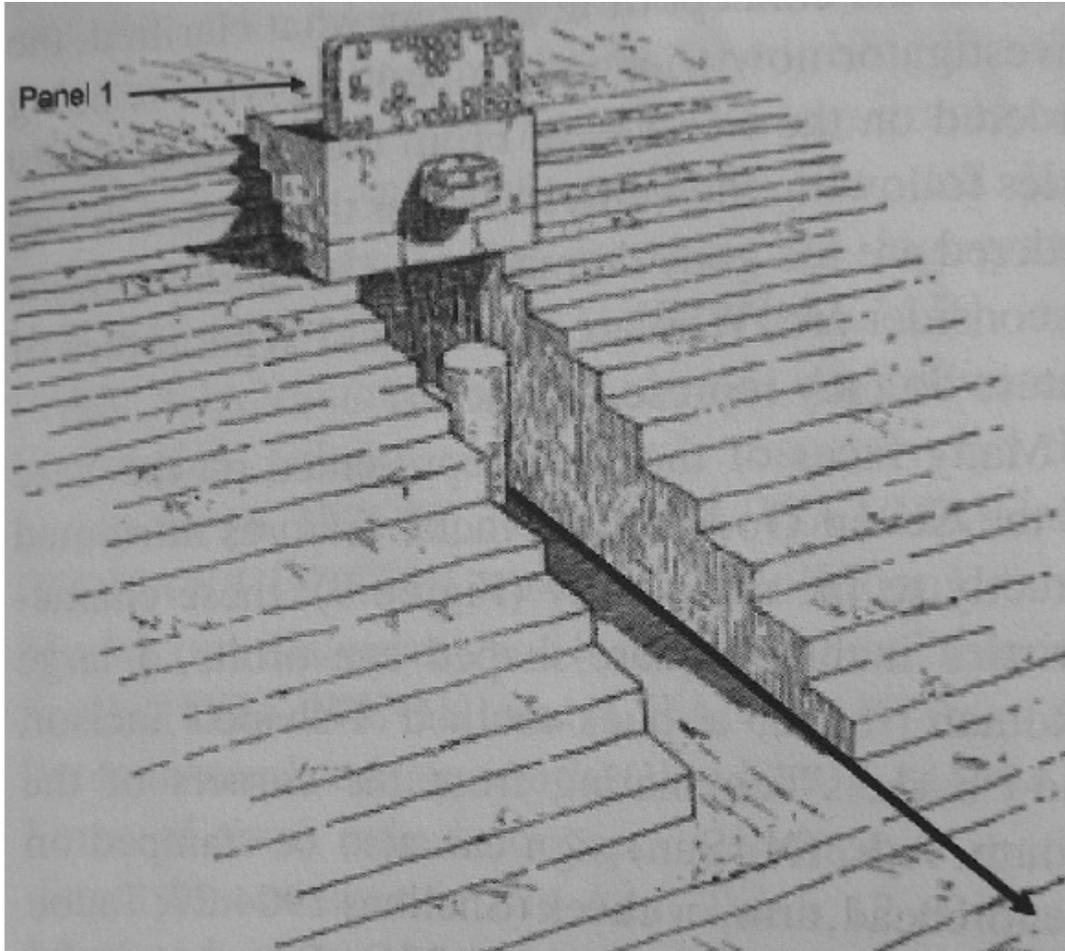


Figure 2. Panel 1, the carved disk, the column, and the alignment channel on the Caracol

I want to talk about three dates that are recorded on Panel 1, and the images carved on the circular stone disk that protrudes over the cylindrical column, in the channel below. The three dates:

13.0.0.0.0 — August 11, 3114 BC (the 13-Baktun Era Base)

10.2.17.0.0 — May 14, 886 AD (a Tun period-ending)

10.2.1.6.0 — December 4, 870 AD (a 3-11 Pik Station)

All three dates are bound together in a statement about the Chichén Itzá king K'ak Upakal, who is mentioned in other texts as one who orchestrated or oversaw two warring factions at Chichén Itzá. The Era Base date is unusual, as there are only about twenty examples of the 3114 BC Era Base being mentioned in Maya texts. Here, it is linked to the date in 886 AD, a contemporary date during K'ak Upakal's reign which probably signifies the dedication of the Caracol building. Also, the day falls in mid-May, just a few days before the solar zenith-passage date-range of May 20-25. And on those days the sun sets along the horizon pointed to by the viewing platform and the channel. The date is also a 17-Tun period-ending, the end of a 360-day Tun. Rituals were often timed or recorded as occurring on a period ending in the Long Count, even if the intended event

was a few days away. This was for calculation purposes, or to ensure that the celebration was timed to an auspicious Ahau day in the calendar (all Long Count period-endings fall on an Ahau day).

So, in the first two dates we have two solar zenith-passage dates, separated by 3999 completed years, symbolically meaning that the 4000th Tropical Year from the Era Base had just begun. The August 11 Era Base date was the solar zenith-passage date at a latitude further to the south of Chichén Itzá, where the Long Count was invented (by the Izapan culture). This solar-zenith parallel seems intentionally set up in the inscription, with K'ak Upakal serving as an emissary or lord of the Zenith Center. The image of the sun in the zenith is like the Sun God being enthroned in the center of the sky.

The third date adds an astounding wrinkle to this already compelling picture. It is December 4, 870 AD. This date is what is known to scholars as a “3-11 Pik Station.” Without getting into the baroque details, the following can serve as a sketch of what these “stations” are about. In the thousands of carved texts and painted inscriptions, a Maya king sometimes recorded when he reached a “3-11 Pik Station” during his rule. Barbara MacLeod and other scholars have deciphered that the “3-11 Pik” glyph refers to a specific interval in the Maya calendar, which totals 71.13 years. Incredibly, this interval is almost exactly 1° of precessional shifting.

The “station” dates were calculated by the Maya from the Era Base back in 3114 BC. So, the 3-11 Pik Stations *are precessional markers or way-stations, indicating a precessional time-resonance with the zero date of the 13-Baktun cycle*. The one that K'ak Upakal lived through fell sixteen years before the dedication of the Caracol Observatory. He ties that station to the other two dates. Why? Well, we have to look at the astronomy of the 3-11 Pik Station date, on December 4, 870 AD. We see that the sun was positioned right at the Milky Way-ecliptic Crossroads, in the Dark Rift “birth canal” of the Maya Creation Myth. This is the same location of the sun on December 21, 2012, which is the centerpiece of my Solstice-Galaxy Alignment Reconstruction (SGAR).

If the reader is unfamiliar with my work, the following books can be read: *Maya Cosmogogenesis 2012* (1998), *Galactic Alignment* (2002), *The 2012 Story* (2009). In brief, I showed that the ancient Maya intended their 2012 cycle-ending date to target the rare alignment of the sun, on the December solstice, with the bright band of the Milky Way — specifically, the place where the Dark Rift feature is, within the “nuclear bulge” of the Galactic Center. The Maya called the Dark Rift the *Xibalba be* — the Road to the Underworld.

What we have with the 3-11 Pik Station date, in 870 AD, is a replication of the era-2012 galactic alignment, except in 870 it didn't happen on the solstice. Nevertheless, the sidereal position of the sun is the same, just like the sun is in the zenith on the two other dates on Panel 1. The implication, then, is that the 2012 New Era Base date is implied in a parallelism, just as the Era Base in 3114 BC is the mythic reference point for the Caracol's dedication in 886, at a similar solar zenith-passage. You see, for the Maya, there were several cosmic centers, and they acknowledged them all. The Zenith Center is one center. The Galactic Center, indicated by the Dark Rift and the Crossroads of the Milky Way and the ecliptic, is another. Those centers are “activated,” one might say, when the sun occupies them. Unfortunately, there isn't a specific reference to the 2012 date on Panel 1. The problem here is that only about 40% of the glyphs on the panel survive.

There is, however, a curious statement after the 3-11 Pik Station date, which involves a “1 Ahau” date, a 12 Haab period, and an eroded partial “fire” glyph. The 12 Haab (12 x 365 days) might be an interval intended to be added to the 3-11 Pik date. When we do this, we reach a 1 Ahau date: December 1, 882. This date also places the sun close to the Dark-Rift/Crossroads! Furthermore, it is exactly two Calendar Rounds prior to a well known Venus Round inauguration in 934 AD, which served as a base for calculations in the Dresden Codex. This provides further evidence that the sun’s position on these dates was a significant aspect of the narrative, as it parallels the coupling of the other two dates.

We thus have reconstructed two reference frames: The sun at the zenith (rooted to the 3114 BC Era Base), and the sun at the Crossroads (referential to the New Era Base in 2012). Why would these two astronomical configurations be important to K’ak Upakal? For this we must look to the symbolism of the carving on the circular stone disk, which protrudes below Panel 1.



Figure 3. The Two Cosmological Centers/Avatars

This is really the key that brings it all together. On the lower left we see the serpent tail of Captain Serpent (Quetzalcoatl-Kukulcan, the avatar of the Pleiades cosmology that is rooted in the 3114 BC solar Zenith Center alignment). On the lower right we see the sun-

ray headdresses diagnostic of Captain Sun Disk (One Hunahpu, the solstice Sun Lord rooted in the 2012 Galactic Center alignment). And in the section above, we have the higher third that integrates the lower two, with a deity-figure suspended above a smoky invocation ritual. This most likely depicts the actions of K'ak Upakal and his followers, to affect an integration of the two competing precessional cosmologies, associated with Quetzalcoatl (the Calendar Round system of the Toltecs), and One Hunahpu (the Long Count system of the Maya).

The cosmological “reconciliation at Chichén Itzá” model that I proposed in my 1998 book *Maya Cosmogenesis 2012* thus finds further confirmation. K'ak Upakal saw himself as the high king of the restored Creation Mythos, for he reconciled the two cosmological avatars and their respective precessional cosmologies, one pointing to 3114 BC and one pointing to 2012 AD. He bridged the Alpha and the Omega and sat in a third, higher, throne from which emanated the two other cosmic center deities. (2000 words)



John Major Jenkins (b. 1964) is a pioneering voice in reconstructing Maya cosmology and the meaning of 2012, with nearly three decades of experience defining and debating the issues. Informed by his own innovative field work at archaeological sites and inspired by living among the Maya, Jenkins' comprehensive work covers media misconceptions, 2012 theories, consciousness studies, Maya shamanism, archaeoastronomy, Perennial Philosophy, academic misconceptions, and the crisis of the modern world. His “2012 alignment theory” is supported by recent discoveries in the Maya inscriptions, and professional Mayanists are now echoing his earlier work. While integrating the scientific and spiritual viewpoints, Jenkins

articulates and honors contemporary Maya calendar tradition and the universal worldview of a unified cosmos — the interdependence of all things.

John's writings have appeared in magazines, newspapers, peer-reviewed journals, and book anthologies, including: *The Mystery of 2012*, *Towards 2012*, *New Dawn* magazine, The Institute of Maya Studies, *Society for American Archaeology*, *Clavis* (2014), and *Zeitschrift für Anomalistik* (2014). His major works include *Journey to the Mayan Underworld* (1989), *Tzolkin* (1992, 1994), *Maya Cosmogenesis 2012* (1998), *Key to the Kalevala* (1999, editor and introduction), *Galactic Alignment* (2002), *Unlocking the Secrets of 2012*, (audio, 2007), *The 2012 Story* (2009), *Lord Jaguar's 2012 Inscriptions* (2011), *Reconstructing Ancient Maya Cosmology* (2012), and the forthcoming *Ivory Tower, House of Cards: How Scholars and Their Publishers Violate Science*. He is a founding member of *The Maya Conservancy*. Websites:

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