

## **Review-Essay of Dennis Tedlock's *2000 Years of Mayan Literature (2010)***

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Tedlock's references to the dark rift in the Milky Way are part of a larger celestial topography that embraces the entire region of Scorpio, Sagittarius, and the nuclear bulge of the Galactic Center. The various astronomical features that he identifies in Maya inscriptions and iconography include, in addition to the dark rift, the Scorpio constellation, stars in Sagittarius, the Crossroads (of Milky Way and ecliptic), a Maya constellation called "the Sixth Sky House," the Milky Way itself, and the base of the Milky Way (the nuclear bulge) as the base or roots of an upright tree. This area literally defines the visually perceived "nuclear bulge" of the Milky Way, otherwise known as the Galactic Center. Since all of these features congregate in this bulge, one would be hard pressed to deny that the Galactic Center was a valid and important feature of Mayan celestial topography.

The iconography associated with these features are varied, and include: a crocodile, a scorpion or bony segmented centipede, the deity named Tz'up'e (God Q, whose name Tedlock translates to mean "Split Down the Middle"), a cave which channels waters at Palenque, a deity named "Lady of Split Place" ("Hawk-Duck" or "Cormorant" who Tedlock believes is Muwan Mat, the spiritual mother of the Palenque Triad), the "cave of the 6<sup>th</sup> Sky," a giant vertical tree, a speaking mouth, and the crook in a calabash tree.

Tedlock examines the role of the region of the dark-rift/nuclear bulge/Scorpio complex in the Creation Texts of Quirigua and Palenque, in rituals performed at Yaxchilan, and in the almanacs of the Dresden, Madrid (p. 235), and Paris Codices. His interpretations and conclusions are stated directly and simply without further exploration or comment. The implications of his findings and interpretations are thus easily overlooked. He states on page 135, for example, that on December 21, 2012 "the sun will be in the middle part of the Milky Way that passes by Scorpius, at the base of the giant tree." He doesn't state or explore the fact that December 21 is a solstice. Nevertheless, he basically acknowledges, albeit indirectly, the solstice-galaxy alignment scenario that has been the main focus of my work to reconstruct the intentions behind the 13-Baktun period-ending date in 2012.

While neither acknowledging or adopting any of the work I've done on the 2012 alignment, Tedlock offers a different interpretation of the astronomical meaning of this date, utilizing Virgo as a female deity named Ix Ajaw Nah ("Lady of the House"), equinoctial positions, and frog iconography in the Paris and Madrid codices. He seems to imply that his reading speaks for something the Maya themselves would have embedded into their Long Count calendar, running into the same issue of intentionality at the origin of the Long Count that I have addressed by examining the iconography at Izapa.

### **1. Tedlock's Introduction to His Book**

On the "non-isomorphic" nature of Maya concepts and deities, Tedlock writes:

Muwan Mat is the name of a goddess in ancient Mayan texts, but she is also called Na' Jemnal, and the two names are often written one after the other. The first name, whose

literal meaning is “Hawk Duck,” is the term for the cormorant, and the other name means “Lady of the Split Place” [2010: 3].

Tedlock later examines, in Chapter 5, the location of this deity at the dark rift (the “Split Place”) and her role as the spiritual mother of the Palenque Triad. Tedlock continues, immediately after the quote above, writing:

The city whose ruins are known today as Calakmul also has two names, and again they are often written together. One of them is Uxte Tun, meaning “Three Stones,” and the other is Chiik Naab’, meaning “Waving Hand” [2010: 3].

Tedlock, in this last quote, writes that Calakmul ALSO has two names, as if he had just provided a precedent for this statement in his discussion of the two names of the Muwan Mat goddess. The analogy is not exactly correct, because the Muwan Mat goddess is not a place name for Palenque. She is, however, a goddess utilized at Palenque, referential to a celestial region opposite the “Three Stones” of Calakmul’s place name (the three stars in Orion’s belt). She is located, as Tedlock mentions, at the dark rift (opposite Orion). The actual two place names of Palenque, which Tedlock seemingly alludes to indirectly and discusses elsewhere (in Chapter 5), are Tokotan (“Cloudy Center”) and b’akha’ ch’uh Ajaw (“Lord who offers shells for Egrets”), or in other inscriptions Bakaiil (“incised bone place”).

If Tedlock’s implied parallelism is maintained, these two place names would have to be found in the celestial topography opposite Orion, namely the dark rift / nuclear bulge region. It is not hard to see how Tokotan supports this notion, since the nuclear bulge which the southern terminus of the dark rift pierces does appear to be cloudy, and since it is located where the Milky Way and ecliptic cross (the “Crossroads”) in the Popol Vuh, then the designation of “center” is also rationally deducible because crosses denote centers in Maya cosmology. As for Bakiil or “incised bone place,” the White Bone Snake or the segmented centipede belongs to the iconographic complex that the skeletal maws do, and these designate the opening to the underworld (the dark rift is the road to the underworld).

The interesting thing about Tedlock’s writing style is that he seems to know more than he is explicitly stating, as if inviting the reader to decode what he’s really wanting to say. His book could be enhanced with a skeleton key to the implied though unstated meanings. The entire book, though lengthy, is itself skeletal as so much more, in unstated implications and supporting evidence for his arguments, could have been added.

## **2. “9 och te”**

Tedlock writes about the Vase of the Seven Lords in Chapter 3. Interestingly, he offers an interpretation that connects the enigmatic deity named Bolon Yokte (named on the Vase) to the Milky Way, indeed to the dark rift as an entry into the Milky Way tree. He writes:

9 och te’ can be interpreted as “the 9 who entered the tree” ... In Chapter 5 we will learn that the tree corresponds to a part of the Milky Way that sometimes stands straight up on the horizon [Tedlock 2010: 38].

Here Tedlock alludes to the southwest horizon, when the nuclear bulge --- the roots of the tree --- are planted into the horizon as the Milky Way tree stands upright. This part of the Milky Way contains the southern terminus of the dark rift, an opening that in this configuration links the sky and earth, providing a doorway uniting different cosmological realms. Tedlock's rendering of the full passage is, however, obscure on this astronomical point:

On 4 Lord 8 Kiln the darkness of the center was put in order, the stars of the center were put in order. The one who gave the sky its place, who gave the earth its place, who gave the 9 jaguars who entered the tree their place, who gave the 3 who were born together their places, who gave the open space its place, who gave Jaguar Night its place, was the Black-Faced Lord, the Star-Faced Lord [2010: 39].

This reading almost seems like an invocation of the directions --- center, sky (up, north), earth (down, south?), dark rift (west?), Orion (east?), open space (?).

### 3. Stela C Quirigua

This is the famous Creation Text that refers to 4 Ahau 8 Kiln, 13.0.0.0.0 in 3114 BC in the context of the three hearth stones (stars) of Orion. Tedlock notes that

At the end of the Quirigua account of the First Three Stone Place comes a mention of another event that took place on the same occasion as the arrangement of the hearthstones. The actor in this event was a god named Wak Chan Ajaw, "Lord of the Sixth Sky," who ruled the sixth place in the Mayan zodiac. His domain included the stars of Scorpius, which were envisioned as a centipede in some places and a scorpion on others. As we will see in the next chapter [Chapter 5], he was also associated with a portion of the Milky Way that was interpreted as an enormous tree when it stood upright on the southwest horizon, with the centipede or scorpion at its base [2010: 53].

According to the Quirigua inscription, it (the tree) arose (*uch'oy*) by the action of the Lord of the Sixth Sky. It seems, then, that Scorpius and the Milky Way, and the Lord of the House located in that region, are involved in a dialectic embedded in the famous Creation Text of Quirigua involving the Orion hearth stones. This text is calendrically, and explicitly, tied to the astronomy of the 13-baktun period ending in 3114 BC, but it sets the stage dialectically for astronomy that is unique to the opposite side of the sky, at the base of the tree in Scorpio.

Tedlock then proceeds to draw an astronomical analogy between the Lord of the Sixth Sky standing upright on 13.0.0.0.0 in 3114 BC and the date 7.6.0.0.0 (September 12, 236 BC (G)), which he proposes is the origin and inauguration date of the Long Count calendar system. He notes that there are important astronumerological divisors in the interval between the two dates. This is very interesting. A 13-baktun period ending connected to stated Long Count positions via astronumerology --- we also see this in the interval between July 23, 667 AD (Date 11 in my chart) and December 21, 2012 (Date 13 in my chart) on Tortuguero Monument 6 [Jenkins 2010a].

#### 4. Cormorant and her sons at Palenque

In Chapters 5-7 Tedlock examines the inscriptions in the famous temples at Palenque, known as the Temple of the Cross, Temple of the Sun, and Temple of the Foliated Cross. He calls these The Temple of the Sixth Sky, the Temple of the Sun-Eyed Shield, and the Temple of the Tree of Yellow Corn respectively. Chapter 5 lays out the astronomical framework that Tedlock sees at work in these famous inscriptions. After discussing the two place names used at Palenque (see above), he mentions the Rio Otulum and its “cave” --- an aqueduct that took the river underground between the temples and the palace. In later discussions it becomes clear that these were recognized as terrestrial counterparts to the Milky Way and the dark rift by the people of Palenque.

Next, Tedlock explains that the Temple of the Sixth Sky (the highest of the three temples) gets its name because it faces south-southwest, and shortly before midnight (on the ritual dedicatory date recorded within) “observers could see the part of the Milky Way that passes through Scorpius and Sagittarius standing straight up on the horizon, like an enormous tree” [2010: 60]. At the top of this tree, notes Tedlock, sits the constellation Aquila (laying along the dark rift north of the ecliptic) which “perhaps corresponds to a goddess” whose name is Muwan Mat, literally “Hawk Duck,” which Tedlock translates as “Cormorant” [2010:61]. Importantly, another name for her is Na’ Jemnal, the “Lady of Split Place.” Based on the astronomy of her likely location in the sky, Tedlock suggests that this name probably comes from “her proximity to the Great Cleft, which divides this part of the Milky Way into two strands” [2010:61].

Meanwhile, at the foot of the tree lies Scorpio which looks like a “monstrous centipede” described as *b’akel*, “bony,” or “segmented” [2010:61]. Tedlock adds that “An area of the sky that included the centipede and the corresponding part of the tree trunk was called Wakaj Chan Na, or “Sixth Sky House,” because it came sixth in the sequence of thirteen signs in the Mayan zodiac” [2010:61]. In the unnumbered end note to this chapter, Tedlock explains that his positions for the Sixth Sky House and the 8<sup>th</sup> House of Corn Silk “are based on their positions in the sequence of thirteen zodiacal signs on pages 23-24 of the Paris Codex, as numbered chronologically rather than in the staggered order in which they are presented” [2010: 411]. He directs the reader to the essay “Moon Woman Meets the Stars” in *Skywatching in the Ancient World* (D. Tedlock and B. Tedlock, 2007) for more information.

The dedication date of the three temples involved a 3-day ritual July 21-23, 690 AD. Tedlock notes that Jupiter, Mars, and Saturn were crossing the Milky Way “between Scorpius and the Great Rift” on these dates [2010: 63]. He identifies these planets as “the guardian spirits of brothers who are described as triplets” --- Mars, the guardian of “Corn Silk at the Tip of a Single Ear”, Jupiter, the guardian of “Sun-Eyed Lord of the Shield”, and Saturn, the guardian of “Young Mirror Scepter” [2010: 61]. Tedlock’s astronomical map on page 61 shows the sky on the night of July 22, 690 AD, with Jupiter, Mars, Saturn, and the moon near Antares (the brightest star in Scorpio). This position also places them in a nice visual proximity to the open entryway into the dark rift.

Tedlock suggests that the moon was conceived as the wandering guardian spirit of “the goddess Cormorant” [2010: 62], and also that the coming together of the three planets at the “centipede constellation” (Scorpio) was particularly meaningful for Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar (the son of Janaab Pakal, who dedicated these temples and is depicted in their

iconography) because “his personal spirit familiar was a centipede” [2010: 62]. By the next day (July 23, 690) the moon had shifted eastward into the middle of the Milky Way (aligned with the southern terminus of the dark rift) and on this date Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar performed a self-sacrifice of blood and dedicated the temples.

The purpose of this rite, according to Tedlock, was to conjure the ghost of a dead relative, his paternal grandmother, named in the inscriptions as “the namesake of the lady of the sky.” Other inscriptions confirm that “Cormorant” was one of her names and thus this ancestor, who ruled Palenque for a few years just prior to Janaab Pakal taking the throne in 615 AD (on another July 23 date!) was the earthly representative of the celestial mother of the three deity-sons. Her celestial or astronomical location thus involves the moon when it aligns with the dark rift, the dark rift itself, and Aquila (which is located north of the ecliptic along the dark rift). It is not surprising that the dark rift in the Milky Way is referenced in these texts as a kind of birth place, since the larger connotations of its known meanings (as a portal to the underworld) support that connotation.

Tedlock notes that the highest temple, long known as the Temple of the Cross, is actually named Wakaj Chan, “Sixth Sky.” The reason why is because “the Milky Way tree” can be seen through its front door “in the middle of the night during the dedication ceremonies” (on July 21-23, 690) [Tedlock 2010: 62]. The limestone tablet at the back of the room in the temple depicts Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar (the son of Pakal) as a boy of 7 and as a man of 49. The boy is being *designated* the heir to Pakal while the man, 42 years later, is *receiving* the lordship. The cross that stands between boy and man is the vertical upright Milky Way. Although Tedlock doesn’t state this, the horizontal arms of the Milky Way tree, portrayed as a double headed serpent bar, would possibly represent the ecliptic. Or perhaps, the sun and moon symbols in the basal panel would designate the ecliptic. At the top of the tree is a bird, probably a manifestation of the goddess Cormorant [2010:63].

The *nehn k’awiil*, or mirror scepter, is the ritual object placed sequentially in the four directions according to the 819-day count. Gerardo Aldana wrote that it is in the inscriptions of the Triad Group of temples that we first find the use of the 819-day count [Aldana 2007: 108-9]. That would place its first use at July of 690 AD. Lounsbury (1978) had attributed the first use of the 819-day count to a short time before Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar’s reign (ca. early 680s), but the Palace Tablet referenced by Lounsbury was actually composed decades after Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar took office. This text, and the 690 AD Triad Group texts, are actually retrospective dates [Aldana 2007: 125]. So, it’s actually unclear whether Aldana believes that the 819-day count was first used in 690 AD or decades later. He also notes that “a second text carries an 819-day count for 9.11.15.11.11” (March 10, 668 AD (J)) but again this appears to be retrospective from a later composition. In any case, for some reason Aldana does state (see above) that the Triad Group of temples, dedicated in 690 AD, contain the first use of the 819-day cycle. In fact, however, Tortuguero Monument 6 contains an astronomerologically significant interval between its July 23, 667 (J) date and its December 21, 2012 (G) date --- it is 819 x 600 days. The composition and dedication of the Monument 6 stela occurred very probably in 669 AD and certainly no later than 679 AD, as that is when Bahlam Ajaw died and that information would certainly have been included in the Monument 6 text if it was carved later than that. In either case, we have a new site, outside of Palenque, for the first use of the 819-day count.

In the inscription within the Temple of the Sixth Sky, the second date, which is counted from the hearthstone event of 13.0.0.0.0 with a DN of 1.9.2, is 101 synodic months after the birth of Cormorant (12.19.13.4.0) and brings us to 13 Ik, when Saturn “turned around” (stationed) in the Sixth Sky House, the “base of the great Milky Way tree” [Tedlock 2010: 66]. In this quick succession of calendrical connections in the inscriptions, we see that the Maya rhetorical goal was to link the 3114 BC hearthstone event involving Orion with the birth of the spiritual mother of the Triad Deities and Saturn stationing in the nuclear bulge of the Galactic Center. That’s pretty astounding.

A 9.0.0.0.0 date is alluded to in the inscription. Ahkal Mo Naab, an early king of Palenque, is named toward the end of the inscription from the Temple of the Sixth Sky, as one who was passed the white paper signifying rulership. This ruler acceded to the throne when Jupiter was aligned with the dark rift, and he died when the sun was aligned with the dark rift, in 524 AD.

## **5. The Temple of the Sun-Eyed Shield**

This temple also depicts Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar at ages 7 and 49. The face of the sun-eyed shield at the center of the tablet is that of K’inich Ajaw Pakal, or “Sun-Eyed Lord of the Shield,” whose guardian spirit is not the sun but Jupiter. The father of Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar is named K’inich Pakal or “Sun-Eyed Shield” (Janaab Pakal) and he was a lord “who saw 5 score stones.” This means that his life touched 5 different katun periods. Likewise, Bahlam Ajaw of Tortuguero was also a lord who saw 5 katuns, as he was born during the 8<sup>th</sup> katun of the 9<sup>th</sup> baktun (in 612 AD) and he died in the 12<sup>th</sup> katun of the 9<sup>th</sup> baktun (in 679 AD). His life thus touched the 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> katuns.

Tedlock, page 78: 1.18.5.3.6, the first date in the Temple of the Sun-Eyed-Shield, is reckoned with a Distance Number from 13.0.0.0.0 in 3114 BC. It does provide a date on which Jupiter was rising before the sun in the east, but it doesn’t seem to be a “first rising.” Tedlock asserts, however, that this was intended and is thus a theoretical reckoning of first rise. Probably more relevant is the fact that the sun was within a degree of exact alignment with the Crossroads in The Sixth Sky. This provides an intriguing reckoning of the zenith astronomy of 3114 BC with the sun’s alignment that occurs on 2012 AD. However, back on 1.18.5.3.6 the solstice was 61 days away. It may be significant in the context of this inscription, because it leads to Sun-Eyed Shield Jaguar’s designation as future ruler at age 7, occurring on an analogous alignment in 642 AD, 3,001 years later. (3,001 years approximates 2 “year drift periods” in which 1507 tropical years = 1508 haab.)

The ritual event that occurs on July 23, 690 is apparently timed by the moon’s passage “directly below Split Place, the Great Cleft in the Milky Way” [2010:80]. The visual parameters of the boundaries of the southern terminus of the dark rift are debatable as they depend on atmospheric conditions as well as visual acuity of individual skywatchers, but here Tedlock opts for the side of caution in saying “directly below.” This would be true of the bulk and deepest black of the dark rift, but visually it grays into the region of the ecliptic. These are perhaps moot points; my point is that when I say a body “aligns with” the dark rift I am indicating the same process that Tedlock alludes to above.

Page 80 --- bottom. Tedlock's discussion of the astronomy associated with June of 641 and Mars is incorrect; I can't confirm the Mars configuration he refers to on this date. However, the significant reference point for Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar's "coming down from the tree" was ultimately 9.10.10.0.0 --- December 1, 642 (J), *a very nice alignment of the sun with the Crossroads near the dark rift*. This circumstance is very intriguing because meanwhile, nearby at Tortuguero, Bahlam Ajaw would be taking the throne in just over 14 months. He was born when the sun was in the exact same position, in 612 AD.

## 6. Temple of the Tree of Yellow Corn

Here we have a dialectic between Orion and Scorpio. To state the obvious, the most likely reason for the placement of this dialectic in these astronomical locations has to do with the placement of the two celestial crossroads (of Milky Way and ecliptic) in those regions. Orion is alluded to at the end of the inscription, just as The Sixth Sky was mentioned at the end of the Creation Text on Quirigua Stela C. A desire to conceptually link opposite parts of the sky, as if by analogy, is likely in these kinds of oppositional associations. It's an indirect indication that, perhaps, that both parts of the sky were dialectical frames of the 13-Baktun Creation Mythos.

The narrative switches back to Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar's birthday, May 18, 635 (J). In another one of those odd coincidences, Bahlam Ajaw died one day more than 44 years later, May 19, 679 AD. Recall that Bahlam Ajaw was born almost exactly 88 years after Ahkal Mo Naab of Palenque died (we can't be exactly certain because of the 5-day ambiguity in the DN that generates Bahlam's birthday).

After focusing on the astronomical alignment of Mars, Saturn, Jupiter and the moon in The Sixth Sky, at the gateway into the dark rift, the inscription "abruptly turns away from that spectacle" to Venus in the pre-dawn morning sky, aligned with the Milky Way-ecliptic crossroads opposite the dark rift, "not far from the hearthstones in Orion" [2010:92]. A final date projects slightly into the future, to the katun ending of 9.13.0.0.0 (March 13, 690 J).

The "Conch of Invisibility" (Matawil) and "Tassel Mountain" are iconographic features in the lower left and right of the tablet within the Temple of the Tree of Yellow Corn. They are both symbolism of underworld emergence. Tedlock believes that Matawil is read as invisibility, meaning when a planet descends below the western horizon. If this is true, the analogous situation of a planet's invisibility during inferior and/or superior conjunction with the sun could also be interpreted as "matawil."

The three temples have basal panels that indicate sky, earth, and underworld --- the three cosmological domains.

## 7. Lady Shark Fin's Rites at Yaxchilan

At Yaxchilan we see a 42-year difference between ritual events and sacrifices. As Tedlock notes, these and other rituals were timed when the moon was new, full, or passing through the Milky Way. "The inscriptions on the other lintels of the palace reveal that Lady Shark Fin timed all her séances for occasions when the moon was new, full, or about to cross the Milky Way" [2010: 101-102]. The dedication of Lady Shark Fin's palace occurred on August 3, 723 AD, almost 42 years after the rite she did during her husband's accession (October 21, 681

AD). Tedlock notes similar ritual timings shared between Palenque and Yaxchilan: “At Palenque, Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar was the one who conducted a séance while the moon was entering this part of the Milky Way. Like Lady Shark Fin, he sought spiritual communion with a spiritual being of the opposite sex” [2010:105].

Note: Does the 42-year interval relates to Uranus? It is also evident in the Sun-Eyed Snake Jaguar interval between age 7 and 49. Also in the interval between 353 AD and 647 on TRT Mon 6.

## 8. The Dresden Codex “Ayin” Crocodile at the Dark Rift

Finally: The “Ayin” crocodile in the Venus almanac of the Dresden. Page 208 in Tedlock: “On 1 Lord, the Great Star is caught where the day begins by the Crocodile, when 2,920 days have passed, on 3 point.” Tedlock explains this passage in the Dresden almanac as follows: “The last of all the characters is Ayin, or “Crocodile,” who catches the Great Star [Venus] when it is in Sagittarius. His home is probably in the Milky Way, perhaps in the part that includes the Great Rift” [2010:212]. Tedlock is cautious here. But obviously, this is a compelling identification because of the *de facto* sidereal placement of the Venus event in the location of the dark rift in the Milky Way — the mouth of the Milky Way crocodile.

## Conclusion

Tedlock’s book repeatedly focusses on the role of the dark rift (and related astronomical features (such as the “Sixth Sky House” and the Scorpius centipede or scorpion constellation) in virtually all of the best known Maya documents and Creation Text inscriptions. He shows meaningful astronomical patterns that integrate hieroglyph decipherments, deity roles, and related iconographic depictions. His observations and conclusions are understated, however, in terms of the implications for understanding astronomical alignments occurring in era-2012, which he does in fact devote a chapter to. Although a great deal of his book deals with astronomical alignments to the dark rift in Classic Period and post-Classic texts, instead of then addressing the rare precession-based alignment to the dark rift that occurs in era-2012 (which he refers to obliquely at the top of page 135) he instead presents an idea about the pre-dawn meridian passage of Virgo on December 21, 2012. This is a rather large disconnect in the overall trajectory of where the evidence he presents seems to be leading. It feels like some additional explanation is needed. Given the demonstrated interest of the ancient Maya in the dark rift and its general region, the question that should have been addressed is: *could the ancient Maya have been aware that the solstice sun would be aligning with the dark rift region in the era of the current 13-baktun period’s ending, in 2012?* The inscription of Tortuguero Monument 6, which Tedlock did not address in his otherwise path-breaking and insightful book, provides compelling evidence in the affirmative.

John Major Jenkins. [The Center for 2012 Studies](#). April, 2010.