

Mayans: the Prophets of Apocalypse?

December 2012: As we near the end of its 5,200 year cycle, the Mayan calendar has inspired many to believe the end of the world is nigh. Everywhere new “prophets” are on the rise. But what do modern-day Mayans think about this prophecy? This article is a field survey into the 2012 phenomenon.

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“Tell the world not to worry; it is not the end of the world,” exclaims Pedro Cruz, the Guatemalan shaman of San Pedro village, seated in front of a shrine dedicated to his ancestors. “On the contrary, we will experience the Great Change that the Mayans have predicted in celebration and joy.”

Why then do followers of the New Age movement prepare themselves to face the worst case scenario? The Internet has exploded in thousands of websites dedicated to the Mayan prophecy as predicting the apocalypse in December 2012. Cinema and literature exploring 2012 cataclysmic theories abound: some speak about natural disasters, others warn of divine wrathful punishment. Even theories on extraterrestrial acquisition can be found.

However, far from the hype, the Mayans of Central America seem unworried about their own prophecy. In fact, only certain isolated communities still use the ancient calendar. In these villages, the elderly teach their children the harvest cycles by referring to the annual rhythms of the sun and moon. The local priests use this traditional computation of time to plan their ceremonies; shamans use the calendar when they drive out bad spirits from the forest. After childbirth, parents entrust Aj' Quij, the “storyteller of time”, to read the astrological chart of their newborn. This interpretation will reveal the child's gifts, their mission in life and their Nahual or “sacred animal”.

For these true users, the calendar remains a quotidian tool, practical and concrete, which does not predict the brutal rapid decline of humanity or anything thereof. Various Mayans anticipate 2012 planetary harmonies, such that humanity “will unite with nature” and that “we will know peace, since man will become strong and calm like a river.” Still, according to some Mayans, the change will be slow while “natural disasters accelerate”. Despite these, Mayan predictions are far from the catastrophic forecasts and apocalyptic rumours of the west.

The Mayans seem to be targets of an appropriation of their ancient calendar. Yet, who is this community with an opulent past that has drawn with precision the future of humanity? And what is the accurate prophecy for 2012, according to modern Mayans themselves? From the high mountains to the deep jungle of Central America, from museums to the old cities, from modern colonial towns to the most isolated rural

communities, a field investigation reveals the truth and the exaggeration of this ancient mysterious prophecy.