

Email exchange with Mark Van Stone, December 2010 – January 2011

Compiled by John Major Jenkins

This was during and after the MEC-FACEBOOK Discussion, that concluded on December 20th of 2010. I had invited Mark Van Stone, on December 7th, along with many other scholars, to participate in this MEC-sponsored dialogue about my work. I had noted that he did not participate, which was surprising as he has been critical of my work, in ways that were misleading and ignoring of what I'd actually written. So, this can be considered a kind of addendum to the MEC-FACEBOOK Discussion.

On Sat, Dec 18, 2010 at 9:20 PM, John Major Jenkins <kahib@ix.netcom.com> wrote:

Mark [Van Stone],

Did you receive my invite of December 7? If so, I'm surprised you didn't want to weigh in, given your interest in 2012 --- and your role in the Austin "2012" section in March. It was a pretty lively discussion, see link at <http://thecenterfor2012studies.com/>. Were you following it? Any thoughts? Best wishes,

John [Major Jenkins]

He seems to have quickly responded briefly with a query as to what it was about, and I clarified on the 19th:

On Sun, Dec 19, 2010 at 10:31 AM, John Major Jenkins <kahib@ix.netcom.com> wrote:

Mark,

It's a discussion of my SAA paper on astronomy in the Tortuguero inscriptions. Stan Guenter brought up your belief that the solstice was of little or no consequence to the Maya. I've seen this also in your work, and I've tried to apprise you of the evidence for solstice orientation, especially in the very relevant context of the time and area of the Long Count's origins. So, in one of my exchanges with Stan I provided a citation which you should acknowledge, not to mention my work on the solstice orientation of the Izapa ballcourt and related monuments.

But apart from the that, there were some great ideas and perspectives that emerged in the discussion, with Barb MacLeod and Michael Grofe making important contributions. Ed Barnhart at MEC said he will leave the whole thing up through the end of December, so it might be gone after you return. I also wanted to bring up the importance of accurately summarizing my work. I thought it was extremely misleading of you to go to Gregg Braden for a sloppy definition of the galactic alignment in your book. Likewise, John Carlson said factually incorrect things about me during his May presentation on the east coast, which he refused to acknowledge when I tried to correct him. Stan of course was the architect of the Power Point presentation that he uses in his

classroom and that David Freidel has also used in public presentations, and as the basis for his “charlatan” charge. David sent this to me a year-and-a-half ago and [almost every reference point to me and my work was factual incorrect or grossly misleading](#). Not to mention Aveni and Krupp; the list goes on. I find it troubling that Maya scholars --- supposed upholders of dispassionate rational truth seeking --- are willing to behave so dishonorably.

My interest here is in encouraging you and the others who write about my work and ideas to accurately describe and summarize, rather than distort, misconstrue, and deconstruct using the tools of debunkery. This would be the decent thing to do, and relatively easy considering the many clear summary statements in my recent book, *The 2012 Story*.

I was also wondering if you had made a disclaimer statement of clarification regarding Carl Calleman’s interview with you, which seemed to co-opt you a bit in support of his 2011 end date and 1 Imix priority of the tzolkin. I had a few emails from people wondering if you were following the Calleman system, which I’m sure you aren’t, but wanted a reference statement regarding your position on the matter. Finally, talk to Michael in Peru about Tortuguero Monument 6 astronomy. Really interesting and compelling stuff, if you know how astronomy works. The key idea in my paper --- that Bahlam Ajaw was born at a time when the sun was aligned with the Crossroads, thus reflecting the astronomy on Dec 21, 2012 --- is Michael’s discovery, which emerged in our conversations after the Tulane 2009 conference. Best wishes,

John Major Jenkins

-----Original Message-----

From: MarkVanStonePhD

Sent: Dec 19, 2010 12:46 AM

To: John Major Jenkins

Subject: Re: MEC discussion of my SAA paper

Sorry, John,

...busy with other things. Will check it out, but leaving in five days for Peru... Can devote more to the discussion after return.

Thanks for checking.

Best,

Mark

Mark seems to have sent an email to me on December 21. He then was off to Peru, so I refrained from immediately responding. In early January I wrote to Mark again, responding to his email of Dec 21:

Hi Mark,

I know you've been busy traveling in Peru, and hope the conference was a great experience for you. I'd like to invite you to read and seriously consider the MEC-sponsored Facebook discussion that is now posted on MEC and *The Center for 2012 Studies*. (The invitation and link to the PDF can be found at <http://thecenterfor2012studies.com/>.) There are several points that I believe you should take to heart that unfolded in the discourse with Stan Guenter, Gerardo Aldana, myself, Michael Grofe, Ed Barnhart, and Barb MacLeod. These are real considerations that should factor into your assessment of Tortuguero Monument 6 and my work generally, including your representation of my so-called "2012 alignment theory." The PDF includes my original SAA presentation, which has since been expanded for future publication.

If possible, I'd really like to see the written part of your paper from Peru --- any chance you could send that to me? I'm catching up with emails after all the work of engaging the MEC discussion last month and converting the 100,000-word document into a PDF. Consequently, I'd like to respond to some of your comments below, from your email to me of Dec 21 (your name marks the places where I respond in BLUE and conclude it with three dashes ---).

Dear John,

Thanks for the heads-up.

When we discussed this a year or so ago, you acknowledged that the Classic Maya indeed did not esteem Solstices very highly... but that the Late Preclassic Maya did, and I should really concentrate on them, since it was they who invented the Long Count.

Mark - I never stated that the Classic Maya did not esteem the solstice highly. On pages 242ff of *Maya Cosmogensis 2012* I mention several examples from Classic and post-Classic sources. Instead, I emphasized to you the importance of looking at the pre-Classic context of the Izapa civilization for evidence of a focus on the solstices in the development of their calendar and cosmology.

I looked in that direction, and found little that I could grasp firmly... Yeah, the Izapa Ballcourt sort of aligns to the solstice sunrise, but so few other buildings

Mark - your statement above betrays your misunderstanding of the Izapa ballcourt alignment. It is not a fair or accurate characterization to state that the ballcourt "sort of aligns" with the solstice sunrise. In the past, I've pointed you to the field research I've done and my reading of the BYU maps, as documented in my 1998 book *MC2012*. Please, don't underestimate or misrepresent the fact of the ballcourt alignment. The ballcourt provides a very accurate alignment to the sunrise on the solstice. Plus, evidence that it was intentional comes from the orientation of the six seating stones and the throne on the west end of the ballcourt. These circumstances confirm the viewing direction. And, the symbolism of the solar god-head emerging from between the legs on the font of

the throne reiterates the meaning of solar rebirth (which occurs on the solstice). The iconography states that the sun is reborn in the direction to which the ballcourt points - the December solstice sunrise. The methodology of my interpretive strategy is called archaeoastronomy.

It will probably mean more to you that in 2000 Aveni & Hartung published their measurements of the ballcourt at Izapa and other pre-Classic sites in the southern Soconusco, and concluded that a solstice-oriented calendrical cosmology was prevalent during the pre-Classic in southern Mesoamerica (Aveni & Hartung, "Water, Mountain, Sky: The Evolution of Site Orientations in Southeastern Mesoamerica," in *Precious Greenstone, Precious Quetzal Feather*, ed. Eloise Quinones Keber, Labyrinthos, 2000). I know you are averse to directly quoting me or citing my own work, but please take note of this. My own publication of the Izapa ballcourt's solstice orientation preceded Aveni & Hartung, but if you need confirmation from Aveni, then please cite that source. The point is that you cannot in all fairness or honesty say that the solstices were unimportant for the Izapans. If you could take a look at the research I've done on Izapan archaeoastronomy and the carved monuments in the ballcourt, you could accurately represent the evidence and the argument that I've been trying to convey to you for several years now. This is documented first in my 1995 book *The Center of Mayan Time*, in greater detail in *Maya Cosmogenesis 2012* (1998), in a concise chapter in my 2002 book *Galactic Alignment*, and is summarized again in my 2009 book *The 2012 Story*. My online pages on Izapa have been up for years:

<http://www.alignment2012.com/izapa.html>

<http://www.alignment2012.com/izapa-solstice-2006.html>

<http://www.alignment2012.com/ballcourt-schematic-and-description.html>

Gregg Braden's is exactly the kind of sloppy claim that I wanted to highlight. You must admit—you have said as much to me—that the vast majority of statements appearing in the 2012 literature are at least as careless and unsupportable. When I chose those quotations for the opening pages of my book, it was precisely because they were the among the very first that I came across.

Mark - Yes, but do you understand how this effectively distorts the cogency and clarity that I've tried to bring to the topic? The alignment research and the argument for the alignment's presence in Maya traditions is my own pioneering work, and you've chosen to highlight someone else's distortion of it, without any reference to me or my own clearer definitions. That's not good Science.

In our previous discussions, I told you why I depended more on Classic sources, which tell us many things explicitly, than on Preclassic, which are open to much wider interpretation.... And even when they tell us stuff explicitly, we cannot understand them, because the Maya are truly different from us. Different, as in, they were nuts for numerology, or at least for counting the days between events... the kind of behavior that in a modern person one would call high-functioning autistic, or idiot-savant. Their gods

had no boundaries... You cannot tell where one leaves off and another begins. They even personified the concept of "godliness" or "sacred" in 'God C', the "generic god", as if s/he were a specific character like God D/Itzamnaaj or God A/Death. ... This is a concept that even seasoned Maya scholars have trouble getting their arms around. When we cannot explain the motivations or choices of people who *write these things down* for us, it is almost impossible to "explain" the choices or iconography of Izapans or Olmecs, who tell us literally nothing beyond the pictures themselves.

Mark - I think you need to study how iconographic interpretation works. The deductive process is similar to how epigraphic deductions operate. You seem to harbor the same suspicion that Stan Guenter has toward "non-explicit" evidence. There is a double-standard in Stan's critique, and probably yours, as conclusions based on sets of mutually confirming indirect evidence are very often agreed upon and accepted by scholars. Please read my responses to Stan's critique in the MEC discussion PDF.

I can guess why the floor of La Venta Tomb A is made of blue clay in the back and red clay in the front, but I bet the reason the artist/architect/priest (even these modern words barely come close to accurately describing the maker of that tomb structure) is much more complex than noting the fact that the tomb (the basalt "log cabin lean-to") lies directly on the "shore" of a buried serpentine pavement, which Linda Schele interpreted as symbolic of a "primordial sea". Good start, but it's only a start.

I acknowledged all the references I used. If I left something out, then I simply missed it. Sorry. I tried to be comprehensive. If there is somewhere I used your discoveries without acknowledgment, well, I apologize, that would never be my intention... And I probably simply came to that knowledge independently. If I knew of and ignored some of your discoveries, it is simply because I don't accept them. At the very best, they may be right, but did not seem well-proven-enough at this time for me to risk stating them.

You have doubtless discovered some important pieces of information, and Science's business is to assess and analyze and use it. You have also co-opted others' ideas without acknowledgment, which is *not* Science's business.

Mark - I'd appreciate some clearer information on the accusation in the sentence above. I have been very acknowledging of prior work by others, including the sloppy ideation of astrologers mentioning the galactic alignment in the 1980s. *MC2012* contains 43 pages of double-column end notes and bibliographic sources. So, please, give me a few examples of what you mean here.

Most important for me, you have buried them all in swamps of unsubstantiated claims, unsupported conclusions, sheer conjecture, and lots of other non-Science. Your long paragraphs usually leave me scratching my head trying to figure out your point. In other words, if I have neglected your real contributions to the field, it is simply because they're so hard to find among all the other stuff.

Mark - in our email exchanges I have summarized very clearly and concisely the main points of my arguments. When your 2012 PDF article was first posted on FAMSI in late 2008, I was astonished that you had ignored a great deal of clear information that I had shared with you. I can be a clear transmitter of information, but clear receivers are needed. (By this, I mean non-biased and non-prejudiced).

I am glad to hear you presented at SAA's. A forum like that will sieve your work, blow away the chaff, allow me (and many others) to better see and understand and appreciate your genuine contributions.

Mark - Actually, as you know the SAA is a presentation venue, and doesn't of itself provide critique. My SAA paper's vetting on the MEC Facebook Discussion page last month did not exactly provide the service of separating the wheat from the chaff in my paper. It was more revealing of the flawed and prejudiced perspectives of my main detractor, Stan Guenter. But what outweighed Stan's reactionary double-standard polemics was the support and detailed arguments for Maya astronomy provided by Grofe and MacLeod. So, I consider the entire discussion to score points for recognizing that intentional astronomy is embedded into Bahlam Ajaw's narrative. You may choose to ignore the arguments and evidence made by myself, MacLeod, and Grofe because you don't agree with them, but I'd suspect that you might have to spend some time understanding the astronomy that underlies the arguments before you could really pass judgment. I'm happy to clarify any questions you have.

I am sorry that you feel disrespected by so many. That's academe... Politics and petty infighting... No, I'm sorry, that's *Life*.

Mark - I'm not expecting respect. I do expect rational assessment and fair treatment by people who claim to practice those values (scholars, those like yourself who present themselves as practicing Science). For example, if a person's work is going to be addressed (such as my 2012 alignment theory), one expects a Scientific critic to first cite the source of that theory and then address it through that person's own arguments, not by selecting sloppy secondary information from other writers, without even acknowledging the originator of the theory. My hope is that you will rise above this kind of misleading approach to critiquing my work.

You may derive a little comfort in the fact that Mike Coe will never get a fair hearing from Ian Graham or Norman Hammond; nor Linda Schele from Hammond or Joyce Marcus, and there are scholars who bad-mouth Arthur Demarest or David Friedel behind their backs, and many who are jealous of, say, David Stuart or Bill Saturno or Kenneth Garrett, "the lucky ones". I know archaeologists who can barely tolerate being in the same room together; one of these has publicly threatened to have the other one killed. The list goes on. (Sound familiar?)

Mark - Yes, you are right in that there a lot of bruised egos and infighting in academia. It's amazing that any progress can happen in that climate. You'd be amazed at the email exchanges I've had with John Carlson --- he reminds me of a little 7-year-old girl I know. He evades responding to simple direct questions and so it's not even a discussion. In any case, we are lucky to have someone like Michael Grofe exemplifying fair and open-minded dialogue and values. What did you think of his paper that he presented in Lima?

You feel academics distort, misunderstand and misrepresent your work? Deal with it.

Mark - I am dealing with it, in the way that I always have. By seeking further clarification and offering to engage a deeper dialogue, and by offering correctives to misunderstandings. For example, your idea that the solstices were unimportant in the pre-Classic Izapan context is demonstrably false. I hope you will not mitigate the evidence for it with dismissive polemics. Please let the facts stand as they are, in support of the work I have done to reconstruct Izapan calendrics and cosmology. Best wishes,

John

Gotta run. Congratulations again for your SAA Presentation. More after I've looked a bit at the dialogue.

Cordially,
Mark

There was no follow-up response from Van Stone. So much for dialogue and communication. On January 19th I gave my presentation at *The Institute of Maya Studies* in Miami. This is posted on Youtube here:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZE_WBfEXLnc.

Then, In March I examined TRT monument 6 in person, at the Carlos Pellicer Museum in Villahermosa. My report is here:

<http://www.thecenterfor2012studies.com/T6Monument.pdf>. Other essays were posted on *The Center for 2012 Studies* website throughout the summer of 2011. I [reviewed David Stuart's "2012" book](#) in June, and I released my book [Lord Jaguar's 2012 Inscriptions](#) in September. In December of 2011, Gelfer's anthology *2012: Decoding the Countercultural Apocalypse* was finally released (containing my response to critics). Also in it, the critiques of Kristine Larsen and John Hoopes were flawed, so I wrote a review-essay on the book and posted it at [Update2012.com](#).

– JMJ, 8-3-2012