

Response to Isabel Hawkins' critique of the galactic alignment at the panel discussion and showing of the film *2012: The Beginning* in September 2012 (at The Tech Museum of Innovation Lecture Series: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJOf7Wvxwy0>)

John Major Jenkins. June 5, 2013

[Audio reading of this review is here \(.wma file, 13 minutes\)](#)

I wish that Isabel Hawkins would have based her comments about my work on my actual published words rather than suggesting that I was evading the astronomical "facts." As with many of the critiques of my work by "professional" scholars, she didn't draw from what I've actually stated and did me the disservice of assuming and asserting a negative characterization of my motivations.

She begins by calling the galactic alignment a "prediction." This is a misleading term, since the galactic alignment is an astronomical occurrence and the challenge of the ancient Maya would have been to *calculate* it. By using "prediction" she frames the discussion in terms evocative of "prophecy" and "predicting" future events. The dating of the galactic alignment would have been a calculation, not a prediction. You don't say: I predict the sun will rise at 6:34 am tomorrow morning. You would calculate that occurrence, based on some knowledge of the astronomy involved.

Addressing the astronomy, Hawkins illustrated the wide span of the Milky Way and then, taking this as her main criterion for what the galactic alignment is, she then notes that it takes something like 400 years for the solstice sun to precess through the Milky Way. Her claim is that "he [me, John Major Jenkins] doesn't want to say '400 years' because that kind of diminishes the significance of this" (33:36). This is a factually wrong assertion, and is a negative characterization of my motivations. She clearly intends to imply that I skirt around and avoid facts and the larger complexities of the topic, which is a tactic of mitigation employed by other under-informed debunkers.

In FACT, in my 1998 book *Maya Cosmogogenesis 2012* (p. 113-114) I wrote: **"In the most generalized scenario, the spatial parameters of this solstice sun-Galaxy alignment can be expanded to include the moment the solstice sun first began to conjunct the eastern edge of the Milky Way, which was something like 450 years ago. The temporal range of the alignment, depending on how we define conjunction, can therefore be on the order of 900 years."** I then go on to discuss the more narrow criterion of the Dark Rift in the Milky Way, which is a key feature of the Maya Creation Myth, and the even more narrow "galactic equator." The galactic equator, with the solar ecliptic, defines a quite precise *crossing point*, the Crossroads in the Maya Creation Myth, which is *relevant to actual Maya concepts and thus how the Maya were likely conceiving and calculating the galactic alignment*. With this criterion, combined with the precise middle-point of the body of the sun, we can discuss a very precise alignment, which resulted in the theoretically precise calculation of Jean Meeus (1997), also alluded to in my 1998 book. But even with this, I questioned the likelihood of making, and the possibility of making, such an absolutely precise calculation and point out that the sun itself is one-half of a degree wide. It will therefore take approximately 36 years for the solstice sun to precess through the galactic equator / ecliptic crossing point.

In FACT, I defined these various parameters, going back to 1994, and was the first to openly introduce and discuss their varying merits. (The description of the galactic

alignment by Terence McKenna was quite vague; the statements by astrologer R. Mardyks were also vague; the discussion by astrologers James Roylance and Daniel Giamario were quite good, which I cited in my 1998 book; and of course Meeus used a precise astronomical definition but he did not discuss an error range for his calculation nor did he address the varying ranges depending on the visual features used.) Because of the careless and low resolution treatment of my work by critics like Hawkins, my full consideration of the complexities of the discussion and the focus I brought to bear on what is relevant to reconstructing how and why the ancient Maya astronomers were employing the astronomical features involved in the galactic alignment, is made muddied and unclear. My 2002 book called *Galactic Alignment* (still in print, widely available online) also goes deeply into the parameters and the ranges.

So, we have a very large alignment range, and a very concise alignment range, depending on how the criteria are treated. Based on the astronomical features and their varying parameters, and wondering about the veracity of the more concise alignment zone (reducible to approximately 36 years) a rational question can be posed: *could the Maya calculate precise sidereal positions of the sun over long periods of time?* Well, apparently the answer is yes, which Michael Grofe has demonstrated in his work, and which he cogently summarized in the 5 minutes that was given to him to speak. He spoke after Hawkins (beginning at 35:20).

It turns out that the sidereal position of the sun at the Crossroads, although varying over the centuries in relation to the seasons, can be identified in Maya inscriptions as being repeatedly of interest. In era-2012, this alignment of the sun and the Crossroads happens on the December solstice. During the Maya Classic Period, it happened 16 – 26 days before the solstice. Rather than being a way to mitigate the relevance of the galactic alignment in era-2012 (which is what Hawkins does), these changing reference points provide a way to track and confirm the Maya's interest in such an alignment, indicating their ability to track and calculate the changing dates of the alignment (changing, that is, in relation to the solstice).

One example of this, identified by Dr. Michael Grofe and published by him in 2011, involves the birthday of the Maya Triad Deity named GI, recorded on the Palenque Temple of the Cross Tablet as November 8, 2360 BC (J). This is a date of the sun's alignment with the Crossroads (some 61 days before the solstice in that era of precession), which is reiterated in the imagery of the Sacred Tree with the GI god-head at its base, depicted in the carving. Lord Jaguar's birthday, Tortuguero Monument 6, and Copan Stela C are other examples. Investigations along these lines have already been pursued and published (for example, in my 2009 book *The 2012 Story*, my presentation at the *Society for American Archaeology* (April of 2010), and Grofe's IAU article (July 2011) and his article in *Archaeoastronomy* Vol. XXIV, and many essays freely available since 2010 on *The Center for 2012 Studies* website (<http://thecenterfor2012studies.com>).

Hawkins would no doubt be interested in these studies, and I would be interested in discussing them with her. However, other scholars who have broadcast incorrect notions about my work and the galactic alignment, when informed of the facts and the research, have almost universally either disappeared and refused to continue (or begin) the conversation, or have found semantically clever and irrational ways to dig themselves deeper into their commitment to mitigation. That's not science.

Isabel Hawkins also suggests that my use of the term “era” is an obliquely evasive way that I allude to a 400-year period for the alignment, but this too is factually incorrect. She stated: “Major Jenkins, I noticed his language, he says that it occurs during the *era* of 2012, he didn’t say [nodding to the picture indicating the 400-year period], he said the *era*. Okay, yes, within this 400-year period, but he doesn’t want to say ‘400 years...’” (33:28) (her emphasis).

As I’ve explained in numerous places in my published books since the late-1990s, *the 36-year range* is what I refer to with “era-2012.” My introduction of this “range” was intended to address the improbable popular perception that the alignment could possibly be boiled down to one day (or even one year!) and to correct the erroneous notion that something dramatic “is going to happen” on the cycle-ending day, December 21, 2012.

Hawkins then goes on to say that “these are all things that are quite immaterial” (33:41) anyway, and that we should be directing our attention “away from the doomsday prophecies” and the “particulars” (33:55) of the galactic alignment. What she does here is to cleverly conflate my work with doomsday, which also is misleading to her audience, and factually false. She never stated that my work is *not* about doomsday. Almost two decades ago I showed that the period-ending doctrine in Maya cosmology, which would apply to 2012, is about renewal. This position is now reiterated by scholars, as of late 2010.

Finally, after dismissing the galactic alignment, Hawkins then reverses her tone and acknowledges Maya astronomical “prowess,” as a segue to introducing “daykeeper Don Roberto” (Maya Spiritual Guide Roberto Poz, father of Ixquic Poz) and “Doña Maria,” as holders of oral traditions (they sit on her left and right). It’s good that she acknowledges the modern Maya and the survival of the 260-day calendar; this is something I’ve advocated, defended, and worked for since 1986. In the film shown that evening, Shannon Kring-Buset’s *2012: The Beginning*, we see the modern Maya expressing their belief in cyclic time and renewal in 2012. (My advocacy for the renewal position on 2012 was criticized by Maya scholars for many years until some of the more progressive scholars took a look at the evidence and began reiterating this interpretation, now confirmed by the Maya.) Reconstructing the lost astronomy and understanding the spiritual teachings around period-ending renewal are not mutually irreconcilable approaches; in fact, I have integrated the two in my work.

Unfortunately, I wasn’t invited to give a presentation at this event - I could have easily explained and clarified things in person. But that’s how these sessions have typically been set up. I didn’t even know this presentation had been posted online (in November 2012) until I stumbled across it yesterday (June 4, 2013).

Notes:

Time code citations (e.g., 33:55) are referenced to the minute/second location of the quotes within the Youtube presentation: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJOf7Wvxwy0>.

[Shannon Kring-Buset](#) also addresses the panel and audience (beginning at 11:30).

About John Major Jenkins: http://johnmajorjenkins.com/?page_id=16

Isabel Hawkins: <http://cse.ssl.berkeley.edu/isabel/>

Michael Grofe: http://www.mayaexploration.org/staff_grofe.php

2012: The Beginning: <http://www.2012thebeginning.com/>