Eight Reasons why the “Maya Prophecies” should be read very skeptically:

1. **Very fragmentary.** What we have is only a few disconnected passages from a lost, and much longer, story.

2. **Contradictory.** Though Aztec, Mixtec, and Maya sources provide us a number of narratives, different versions often disagree, even among the same cultural group. The calendar dates associated with Maya “end date,” Aztec “end date,” Maya gods’ significant days, and “return of Quetzalcoatl” all disagree.

3. **Manipulated.** Tlacaelel, Machiavellian minister to three Aztec emperors, had no illusions about the propaganda power of history, and saw to it that it was rewritten completely to exalt the Mexica and to denigrate rivals. He was neither the first nor the last to do this. At his behest, the Aztecs burned their own libraries as well as their enemies’, in order to start with a clean slate. They even changed Quetzalcoatl’s birthday. Maya dates and historical time-intervals are frequently manipulated for optimum numerological and augural significance.

4. **Misunderstood.** 21st-century Western world-view is secular, scientific, and very different from that entertained by the ancient Mesoamericans. We tend to project our own perspective, interpretations and beliefs on other narratives. For example, their distinctions between truth and myth, and between various individual gods, were nowhere near our categorical boundaries. Gods did not have distinct personalities, they blended into each other, they split into gangs of four or five. The days, and even the numerals, in their calendars were living, powerful individuals. They indicated “myth time” with “unworkable” calendar days. And so on.

5. **Errors.** Maya monuments, particularly dates and distance numbers are full of errors, both of transcription and of calculation. I count something over 50 numerical mistakes carved in stone.

6. **No mention of destruction nor of renewal, nor improvement, connected to the coming 13.0.0.0.0 “end date.”**

7. **Implication that Life and the calendar will continue without interruption beyond 2012, unlike the last time.** (Prophecies describe events in the far future as pretty much like their own. This despite clear evidence that the Maya and Aztecs believed that during the “in-between” times, time itself works in incomprehensible ways, or not at all.

8. **The Mesoamerican concept of “cyclic time” is not completely cyclic.** Each Creation (in both Aztec and Maya tradition) is an improvement on the previous, and the Aztec explicitly states that this one is special, and will be the last. Maya Popol Vuh myth states that in this Creation men reached their ultimate form — in fact, the gods saw fit to “diminish” them, so they would not rival the gods. Does this sound like they expected the next phase of Man’s evolution to be an improvement?

9. **Solstices were of very minor importance.** They are almost never mentioned nor celebrated. However, they did build “E-Groups,” architectural alignments to the Solstices and Equinoxes.

Anybody who says otherwise must be talking to the ancient Maya gods directly.

—Prepared for lecture “It’s Not the End of the World,” by Mark Van Stone, Santa Fe, 30 May 2008
Some of the events proposed to come together on the winter solstice, 21 December 2012:

1. According to ancient records, the Maya Long Count Calendar will reach 13.0.0.0.0. Due to the cyclic nature of Maya calendars, this is the same number as at the beginning of this Creation in August 3114 BC/BCE. The interval is 5125 years & 133 days, or 5125.366 years.

2. On that morning, the Earth and Sun will align with the “Dark Rift” near the Galactic Center. This event last happened about 25,800 years ago.

3. There have been five Creations according to the Aztec records. Five times 5125.366 years is 25,626.8 years. Coincidence?

4. NASA predicts an unusually powerful “Solar Maximum” (sunspot storm) for 2012. This happens every 11 years, and disrupts satellite and other electromagnetic communications.

5. There will be a Venus Transit, an eclipse-type alignment when Venus crosses between Earth and the Sun. We witness a pair of these about once a century: the last few were 1518 & 1526; 1631 & 1639; 1761 & 1769; 1874 & 1882; 2004 & then on 6 June 2012.

6. The magnetic poles of the Earth may reverse, leaving us unprotected from cosmic radiation for a time. The effect of magnetic fields on human creativity, initiative, mood, etc., is still unknown.

7. The return of Quetzalcoatl, according to Aztec and Maya prophecies.

8. The “13” in the Maya date 13.0.0.0.0 means “13 Bak’tuns.” A Maya Bak’tun or Pik is 144,000 days, the same number as the number of devotees taken up in the Rapture, according to the Book of Revelation. Coincidence?

9. The usual disasters loom: food shortages, cataclysmic storms due to global warming, gasoline prices going through the roof, looming chaos in the Middle East—site of Biblical Armageddon and Eden—which will disrupt oil production and bring civilization to a grinding halt (some like to call it Mess-o-’politan).

Some quotations from various interpreters of the 2012 phenomenon:

10. “An imminent polar reversal that will wipe our hard drives clean” (Daniel Pinchbeck)

11. “The dawn of a new galactic/lunar age that supplants the toxic, dying throes of the solar age” (Sharron Rose)

12. The “dawning of a Wisdom Age ... standing on the shoulders of the Information Age.” (Peter Russell)

13. “The moment of total planetary synchronization, 13.0.0.0.0 on the beam, will arrive — the closing out not only of the Great Cycle, but of the evolutionary interim called Homo Sapiens.” (José Argüelles, p. 194)

14. “Earth is about to give birth to its own human neocortex, as we become human neurons in a global brain, with telepathic synapses” (Geoff Stray)

15. “The calendar would begin again.” (Meg Blackburn Losey)

16. “On this date the transition to the fifth dimension of our own evolution will begin. ... In 2012, the Age of Aquarius will commence.” (Janosh)

17. “Most of us are here to finish what we committed to, 26,000 years ago.” (Christine Page, M.D.)

18. “Personally, I don’t believe that anything dramatic will unfold in December 2012.” (Gill Edwards)

19. “The December 21, 2012, date will likely be a “nonevent” similar to ... the widely anticipated Y2K phenomenon.” (Robert K. Sitek)

—Prepared for lecture “It’s Not the End of the World,” by Mark Van Stone, Santa Fe, 30 May 2008
Ten Reasons Ya Gotta Love and Appreciate Maya Cosmology & Art:

A. Prepared for lecture "It's Not the End of the World," by Mark Van Stone

1. Their naked-eye astronomy was as brilliant as any in the ancient world.
   For example, they were aware of, and celebrated, the Precession of the Equinoxes, a
   cosmic cycle 25,800 years long.

2. Their calendars were extraordinarily complicated and sophisticated, among the
   most complex ever devised.
   Although they did not employ leap-year days to correct the discrepancy between their
   365-day calendar and the solar year, they knew that the two would re-synchronize
   every 29 Calendar Rounds, i.e., every 1507 solar years. (A Calendar Round is 52 years)

3. Their timekeeping, cosmology, myth, history, and art were uniquely and intimately
   interconnected, perhaps more so than any other people anywhere. To wit:
   A. Each day of the “week” was a god (actually, so are ours, but we’ve forgotten...).
   B. Each numeral was also a god: for example, 4 was the Sun, 8 the Maize God, 10 was
      Death, etc.
   C. Their number system had place-value and zero (lacking in Roman, Greek, and Hebrew
      numerals). These features allowed calculation with enormous numbers.
   D. Historical events happened on appropriate days. For example, a ritual decapitation
      would be scheduled for a “flint-knife” day. A lord’s birthday and coronation would
      be adjusted for its astrological or numerological significance. (Solstices were never a
      high priority, by the way.)
   E. They were obsessed with specifying an event’s position in time, much more so than
      with its location in space.
   F. Their scribe-mathematicians would link historical events with mythical events, as well
      as two historical events.
   G. Their scribe-mathematicians would link historical events with mythical events, by
      numerologically-interesting intervals, such as 16,380 days (4 x 5 x 7 x 9 x 13),
      or 1,359,540 days (4 x 5 x 7 x 9 x 13 x 83). There are scores of examples.

4. I count something over 50 numerical mistakes carved in stone. Apparently the
   Maya, uniquely, believed that “a card laid is a card played,” and never, ever,
   erased and fixed a mistake.

5. When they performed blood sacrifice, Maya kings and queens drew their own
   blood, not some poor peasant’s. We should all enjoy such leadership.

6. The kind of events their monuments portray, above all, are ritual ceremonies
   (prayers, dances, visions, dedication of monuments — in other words, taking care
   of one’s people).

7. When a Maya farmer lays out a cornfield or builds a house, he consciously
   re-enacts Creation.

8. When a Maya wife grinds corn in the pre-dawn darkness, she consciously
   re-enacts Creation.

9. Art was central to their life, not peripheral as it is in ours.

10. Their calligraphy was arguably the richest, most varied, and beautiful in the
    world.

11. Likewise with their costumes; comparable to those of the Japanese or Chinese
    imperial court.
Points on the Aztec calendar

Derived from the same source as the Maya,

-- similarity of dates (4 Movement, 4 Jaguar, etc., & 4 Ajaw)

-- similarity of rhetorical structure to the Maya Popol Vuh:

-- Both Aztec and Maya describe each Creation as improving on the previous (better food, better people, etc.)

-- This latest creation is clearly the ultimate. There is no suggestion that there would be and end or another creation in the Popol Vuh, and the Aztec Leyenda de las Soles explicitly states that, when the end comes, there will be no other.

-- The description of the people as far-sighted, and needing diminishment, etc., shows that the Popol Vuh also believes this Creation to be the Ultimate.

But Aztec account is much more complete and clear — and contrived, both symbolically and numerologically— than the Maya accounts.

-- the five Creations are ruled by five different gods in turn.

-- each Creation lasts a precise multiple of 52 years —13 x 52, 6 x 52, 7 x 52— (though the "in limbo" intervals between are never specified); thus begins and ends on the same day.

-- each Creation is assigned a color and a direction, and ruled by a different god. The end of each Creation involves struggle between gods for supremacy (reflects Aztec history of conquest).

-- Maya Popol Vuh destructions are more like Noah's Flood: gods displeased with their Creation.

-- The augury of each Creation's calendar date predicts/reflects its end: for example, eaten by Jaguars, blown away by Wind, etc.; this one (4 Motion/Earthquake) will end in a massive earthquake.

Multiple Collapses

1) 900 BCE/BC: the major Olmec city of San Lorenzo was abandoned, and La Ventia rose. (Gulf coast)

2) 400-300 BCE/BC: The Middle Preclassic Collapse snuffed the Olmec Horizon, and fertilized dozens of Late Formative city-states. (pan-Mesoamerica)

3) 100 BCE/BC: Cucullaco, buried by a volcanic eruption (southern Valley of Mexico), coincides with rise of Teotihuacan (northern Valley of Mexico).

3 200 CE/AD: The abandonment of great cities in the Mirador Basin. (Northern Guatemala)

5) 600/650 CE/AD: The burning of Teotihuacán marks the boundary between Early and Late Classic.

6) 600-800 CE/AD: The Late Classic saw not only a dramatic florescence of Maya cities, but also the appearance of new civilizations: Tajín, Huasteca, Xochicalco, Cacaxtla...

4) 900 CE/AD: The Classic Collapse: Maya, Zapotec, Veracruz, etc. (pan-Mesoamerica?)

5) 1500-1540 CE/AD: The Conquest: Introduced disease, the fall of Tenochtitlán (1521), and then the subjugation of the rest of the Americas. (pan-Mesoamerica)

Mesoamericans kept building and crashing, building and crashing.

The typically-Mesoamerican Creation myth also involves repeated destructions and rebuildings; I am sure this is no accident.

—Prepared for lecture "It's Not the End of the World," by Mark Van Stone, Santa Fe, 30 May 2008
Resources for Maya art and decipherment and facts about 2012
Prepared by Mark Van Stone, Ph.D., for “It’s Not the End of the World” lecture


Anything by Michael D. Coe, et al.: Mexico, the Maya, A History of Chocolate, The Maya Scribe and his World (1972), The Art of the Maya Scribe (with Justin Kerr, 1994), and Reading the Maya Glyphs (with Mark Van Stone, 2001, 2005), nearly all published by Thames & Hudson.

Anything by Linda Schele, et al.: Blood of Kings, Forest of Kings, Code of Kings, Maya Cosmos, & Hidden Faces of the Maya, co-authored by Jorge Perez de Lara

Anything by Karl Taube

Anything by David Stuart

Anything by archaeoastronomer Anthony Aveni, such as: Skywatching (Several editions); Empires of Time Calendars, Clocks, and Cultures, 2002; Stairways to the Stars - Skywatching in Three Great Ancient Cultures, 1997; Maya City Planning and the Calendar with Horst Hartung 1986;


Montgomery, John, How to Read Maya Hieroglyphs, Hippocrene Books, 2002

Léon-Portilla, Miguel, Aztec Thought and Culture, (many editions)

Malmström, Vincent H., Cycles of the Sun, Mysteries of the Moon, 1997

Miller, Mary & Taube, Karl, The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya, 1993 (a dictionary)


Houston, Stephen, Chinchilla Mazariegos, Oswaldo, and Stuart, David, eds., The Decipherment of Ancient Maya Writing. University of Oklahoma Press, 2001. This collects together pivotal quotations about Maya writing from the earliest conquistadors through the great code-breakers of modern times.


There are annual Maya Meetings on Culture and Hieroglyphs at University of Texas, Austin, at University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, at Humboldt State University in northern California, in Tallahassee, Florida, in Cleveland, Ohio, in Bonn, Germany, and increasingly in other places. Some of these produce publications

The Web:

Highly-recommended: http://www.mesoweb.com run by Joel Skidmore, has news, guides, information, and many fine resources, articles and archives of photographs. Importantly, it is home to the complete library of Merle Robertson’s thousands of rubbings of Maya reliefs, in high-resolution.
The Web, continued:

Also highly-recommended: the FAMSI website http://www.famsi.org/ is truly encyclopedic, containing several superlative resources such as:
http://research.famsi.org/schele.html Linda Schele’s drawings in high resolution scans (about 2000)
http://www.famsi.org/research/schele/photo.html Linda Schele’s photos of Maya monuments, especially sites, buildings, and details of glyphs and sculpture, in high resolution scans (about 5000)
http://research.famsi.org/montgomery.html John Montgomery’s fine drawings in high-res but bitmapped scans (his pencil drawings suffer under this method), as well as

Every page of the surviving Maya codices can be viewed or downloaded in high-res.pdf files, courtesy of FAMSI, at:
http://www.famsi.org/mayawriting/codices/dresden.html
http://www.famsi.org/mayawriting/codices/madrid.html
http://www.famsi.org/mayawriting/codices/paris.html
http://www.famsi.org/mayawriting/codices/grolier.html

They also have every page of the dozen major Mixteca-Puebla and Aztec codices, though at lower resolution.
Accessible through John Pohl’s excellent introductory guide to Mesoamerican civilizations:
http://www.famsi.org/research/pohl/

Leading to http://www.famsi.org/research/pohl/jpcodices/index.html and
http://www.famsi.org/research/graz/index.html

for example: http://www.famsi.org/research/graz/borbonicus/thumbs_0.html and
http://www.famsi.org/research/cospi/thumbs_1.html and
http://www.famsi.org/research/graz/vindobonensis/thumbs_0.html ... You get the picture.

http://www.famsi.org/research/kerr/ Justin Kerr’s vast photographic collection of compelling and beautiful pre-Columbian objects (at medium resolution), the vast majority of which are classic Maya. Also accessible as
http://www.mavasw.com/

http://academic.reed.edu/uemal/ Reed College’s massive high-res visual resource on Puuc-region Yucatan Maya architecture, including facsimile images of early publications such as Waldeck, Stephens & Catherwood, etc.

http://peabody.harvard.edu/CMHI/about.php The Peabody Museum at Harvard University is home to the Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions project, whose ambitious goal is to publish very high-quality photographs and drawings of every surviving Maya inscription. They have recently posted a low-resolution facsimile of much of the Corpus.

http://ancient-mesoamerica-news-updates.blogspot.com/ Erik Boot’s website with news and pictures of interest to Mayanists and epigraphers.

http://www.pauahtun.org/Calendar/tools.html Ivan van Lanningham’s fine online calculator for translating/correlating any Maya or modern calendar with any other.

http://www.buffington.edu/~sullivann/mexico/mexicoindex.html a good collection of sharp medium-res (and some high-res) photos of art and archaeology of Mexico, operated by Mary Sullivan.

GoogleBooks has a digital copy of about half of John F. Harris’s fine introduction Understanding Maya Hieroglyphs at:
http://books.google.com/books?id=j_lCeYXAOBL&pg=PA156&lpg=PA156&dq=%22seven+gods+22+maya&hl=en

Ivan van Lanningham has developed a good Maya Calendar Converter website, where you can translate any Maya date into our system, and vice versa. Also more arcane tools that calculate Calendar Rounds from Long Counts, and translate between Gregorian, Julian, and any of the Maya calendars:
http://www.pauahtun.org/Calendar/tools.html

The NOVA website at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/maya/code/program.html provides several resources to support their recent showing of “Cracking the Maya Code,” (featuring the calligraphy and hands of yours truly), including a web-feed of the hour-long program you can watch online, and several other educational features.
The state of balance was to be severed by
the battle between Quetzalcóatl and the various Tezcatlipocas,
for these four sons, the first four gods, were forces held in tension,
and because of the perpetual restlessness within them, conflict
was inevitable. Fighting avidly for supremacy, each endeavored
to identify himself with the sun, so that he could rule the lives
of men and direct the destiny of the world. During each age, or
Sun, of the earth, one god prevailed over the others, and he
symbolized one of the elements—earth, air, fire, or water—as well
as one of the four quadrants of the universe. Each god’s period
of ascendency constituted one of the ages of the world. But at
the end of each age, war broke out and destruction followed.
Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcóatl battled, each subdued the other,
then both returned to the field of battle of the universe. The
elements of earth, wind, fire, and water then came suddenly
upon the scene from the four directions and clashed violently.

With a dialectic rhythm which attempted in vain to harmonize
the dynamism of opposing forces, the various Suns appeared and
vanished. The Aztecs moved to stop this process: they conceived
the ambitious project of impeding or at least postponing the
cataclysm which was to put an end to their Sun, the fifth of the
series. This idea became an obsession which stimulated and
made powerful the inhabitants of Tenochtitlan, ultimately
transforming them into:

...a people with a mission. A chosen people who believed their
mission was to side with the sun in the cosmic struggle, to side
with goodness to ascertain its triumph over evil, and to give to all of
humanity the benefits of the victory of the forces of light over the
powers of night. ... 

This powerful motivation soon was transformed into a truly
mystical inspiration, and the Aztecs came more and more to
unify their personal and social activities with the idea of a
collaboration with the Sun. As if hypnotized by “the mystery of
blood,” they expended all of their efforts and energy to provide
the gods with chalchihuitl, the precious liquid drawn from the
sacred victims, the only suitable nourishment for the Sun.

Thus, not only in each year, but also in each day, the influence
of one of the four spatial directions predominated. Space and
time, combining and interpenetrating, made possible the har-
mony among the gods (the four cosmic forces) and, conse-
quently, the movement of the sun and the existence of life. The
profound significance of movement to the Nahuas can be ded-
uced from the common Nahuatl root of the words movement,
heart, and soul. To the ancient Mexicans, life, symbolized by
the heart (y-ollo-ti), was inconceivable without the element
which explains it, movement (y-olla).

The Nahuas, therefore, believed that movement and life re-
resulted from the harmony achieved by the spatial orientation of
the years and the days, in other words, by the spatialization of
time. So long as this harmony continued, so long as the four
directions of the universe were each allotted thirteen years in
every century and their supremacy unquestioned during the
specified time, the Fifth Sun would continue to exist—it would
continue to move. Should this balance some day be disturbed,
another cosmic struggle for supremacy would be initiated. There
would be one final earthquake—one so powerful that “with this
we shall perish.”

In the intervening time, as they awaited the arrival of the
fatal Nahui ollin (day 4-Movement) which would end the cycle
of the Fifth Sun, the Aztecs continued to nourish this Sun daily
with chalchihuitl, the precious sacrificial liquid.

There are more than ten chronicles and annals in which this
myth is related, with some disagreement concerning the number
of the Suns. The version given below, contained in the Leyenda
de los Soles and translated from Nahuatl, appears to be the most
complete and most interesting, principally because of its antici-

14 Alfonso Caso, “El Águila y el Nopal,” in Memorias de la Academia Mex-
AZTEC THOUGHT AND CULTURE

1. Here is the oral account of what is known of how the earth was founded long ago.
2. One by one, here are its various foundations [ages].
3. How it began, how the first Sun had its beginning 2513 years ago—thus it is known today, the 22 of May, 1558.
4. This Sun, 4-Tiger, lasted 676 years.
5. Those who lived in this first Sun were eaten by ocelots. It was the time of the Sun 4-Tiger.
6. And what they used to eat was our nourishment, and they lived 676 years.
7. And they were eaten in the year 13.
8. Thus they perished and all ended. At this time the Sun was destroyed.
9. It was on the year 1-Reed. They began to be devoured on a day [called] 4-Tiger. And so with this everything ended and all of them perished.
10. This Sun is known as 4-Wind.
11. Those who lived under this second Sun were carried away by the wind. It was under the Sun 4-Wind that they all disappeared.
12. They were carried away by the wind. They became monkeys.
13. Their homes, their trees—everything was taken away by the wind.
14. And this Sun itself was also swept away by the wind.
15. And what they used to eat was our nourishment.
16. [The date was] 12-Serpent. They lived [under this Sun] 364 years.
17. Thus they perished. In a single day they were carried off by the wind. They perished on a day 4-Wind. And they became monkeys.
18. The year [of this Sun] was 1-Flint.
19. This Sun, 4-Rain, was the third.
20. Those who lived under this third Sun, 4-Rain, also perished. It rained fire upon them. They became turkeys.
21. This Sun was consumed by fire. All their homes burned.
22. They lived under this Sun 312 years.
23. They perished when it rained fire for a whole day.
24. And what they used to eat was our nourishment.
25. [The date was] 7-Flint. The year was 1-Flint and the day 4-Rain.
26. They who perished were those who had become turkeys.
27. The offspring of turkeys are now called pipil-pipil.
28. This Sun is called 4-Water; for 52 years the water lasted.
29. And those who lived under this fourth Sun, they existed in the time of the Sun 4-Water.
30. It lasted 676 years.
31. Thus they perished: they were swallowed by the waters and they became fish.
32. The heavens collapsed upon them and in a single day they perished.
33. And what they used to eat was our nourishment.
34. [The date was] 4-Flower. The year was 1-House and the day 4-Water.
35. They perished, all the mountains perished.
36. The water lasted 52 years and with this ended their years.
37. This Sun, called 4-Movement, this is our Sun, the one in which we now live.
38. And here is its sign, how the Sun fell into the fire, into the divine hearth, there at Teotihuacán.
39. It was also the Sun of our Lord Quetzalcóatl in Tula.
40. The fifth Sun, its sign 4-Movement.
41. is called the Sun of Movement because it moves and follows its path.
42. And as the elders continue to say, under this sun there will be earthquakes and hunger, and then our end shall come.\(^\text{15}\)