

## The 'End' of the Maya Long Count? 2012 and the Classic Maya

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**Parole chiave:** Maya calendar, Maya 2012, Maya epigraphy, polysemy, epistemology

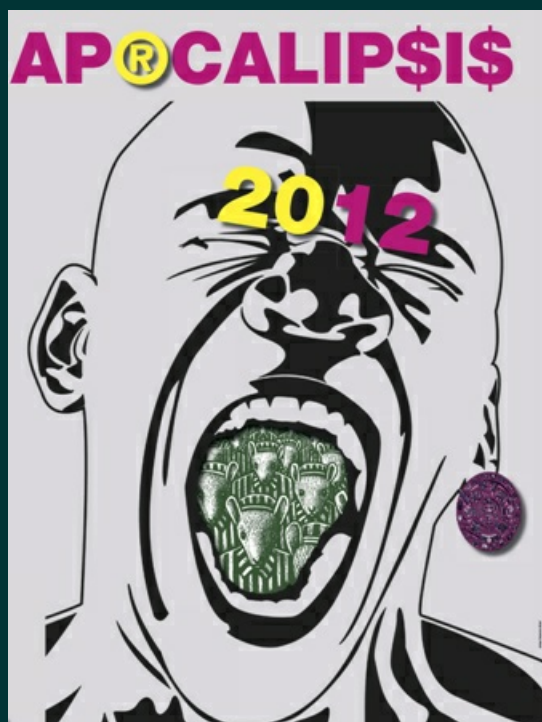
### Abstract

The second meeting of the AISI (Associazione Italiana Studi Iberoamericani) was dedicated to "Apocalypse" in Latin American literature. In the year of 2012 this particular subject was chosen as various non- and pseudo-scientific and New Age publications hold that the Maya Long Count ends in 2012, more specifically on December 21. In this essay I present a short overview on how the idea of an 'end' of the Maya Long Count emerged, which ancient Maya hieroglyphic texts (from the Late Classic Maya period, ca. A.D. 550-900) refer to this particular date, and what the only text (from the site of Tortuguero, Tabasco, Mexico) that may tell us something on 2012 reveals. I also present a short historic overview of the quality of the drawing of the Tortuguero text and how these influenced earlier decipherments, translations, and interpretations of this text. Ultimately, the hieroglyphic text itself is analyzed and one detail is discussed in more detail, the verb root tzutz- and which different, but not necessarily mutually exclusive, meanings it has in Mayan languages.

### Biografia autore

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Erik Boot (1962; Dutch) received his MA in Cultural Anthropology in 1989 from Leiden University, the Netherlands. He conducted anthropological field work in Yucatan (1986-1987). In 2005 he obtained his Ph.D. from Leiden University as well, with a dissertation entitled "Continuity and Change in Text and Image at Chichen Itza, Yucatan, Mexico." He presented papers on a variety of anthropological, epigraphic, and iconographic topics at conferences in the United States, Mexico, and Europe; he is a co-founder and former board member of Wayeb, the European Association of Mayanists. He maintains three weblogs: Maya News Updates, Ancient MesoAmerica News Updates, and Maya Glyph Blog.



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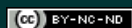
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The earliest known Maya long count was recorded in year 32 AD at the site of Chiapa de Corzo in the Highlands of Chiapas, Mexico. Like the Christian calendar, the long count has a start date: ours is January 1 of 0 AD, and theirs (by our reckoning) is August 11 of 3114 BC. But unlike ours, theirs also has an apparent end date, December 21 of 2012 AD. The long count is represented as a five place notation system of ascending cycles - kins (days), winals (20-day months), tuns (360 days), k'atuns (20 tuns), and bak'tuns (20 k'atuns). The beginning of the 10th bak'tun (830 AD) The end of the Classic period and the still unexplained abandonment of 100's of cities. The beginning of the 11th bak'tun (1224 AD) The abandonment of Chichen Itza in Yucatan and the rise of Mayapan. The Maya long count calendar does have a baktun ending in 2012, an epoch-like period for the Maya that corresponds to about 394 years, or 144,000 days. In a correlation of the Maya's long-count calendar to our Western one, the end of this current baktun, the 13th, happens on Dec. 21, 2012 (or Dec. 23. See sidebar). The long-count calendar counts the time since creation, which the Maya date to what we would call a day in August 3114 BC. Dec. 21 vs. Dec. 23. Dec. 21, 2012 seems to be the most favoured date for when the 13th baktun on the Maya long-count calendar ends. But some sources, incl The ancient Maya were keen astronomers and mathematicians and they had two complex, accurate calendars which they used to record time. The Maya were aware that a solar year was roughly 365 days long and they referred to it as a "haab." They divided a haab into 20 "months" (to the Maya, "uinal") of 18 days

each: to this was added 5 days annually for a total of 365. These five days, called "wayeb," were added at the end of the year and were considered very unlucky. The Calendar Round: The earliest Maya Calendars (dating from the preclassic Maya era, or about 100 A.D.) are referred to as the Calendar Round. 2012 and The End of Maya Time: Baktuns - periods of 400 years - are counted on a base-13 cycle. On December 20, 2012, the Maya Long Count Date was 12.19.19.19.19.