

## THE GRAN UAYEB

By Kenneth Johnson

The system known as the Gran Uayeb is gaining a great deal of interest, both in Guatemala and abroad, but it is also causing a great deal of confusion.

First, let us explain it in the simplest terms. Let us suppose that we begin a Calendar Round of 52 years with 1 Kej (Manik) in 1961. After Kej, E (Eb), No'j (Caban) and Iq' (Ik) have all "carried" each of the 13 numbers, 52 years will have passed and we shall have reached 13 No'j.

Ordinarily, the next year would be called 1 Iq' and would begin on Feb 21, 2013 after a *uayeb* of five days – the five "dead days" of the year during which the Aztecs of ancient times extinguished all fires and spent their time in fasting and prayer.

The Gran Uayeb system proposes that a longer *uayeb* period of 13 days (hence the term Gran Uayeb) should be kept every 52 years, which is to say, at the end of each Calendar Round. This would bring us to a solar New Year's day of March 6, 2013, the day 1 Tz'ikin (Men).

So we have made our way back to a "1" year, which follows a "13" year, but – and this is the important point – we now have a different group of Year Lords – Tz'ikin, Ajpu (Ahau), Kan (Chicchan), and Tz'i (Oc).

Now, for the next 52 years, we progress through this new group of Year Lords while keeping a typical *uayeb* of 5 days.

After another 52 years, when each of these Year Lords (known as *cargadores* in Spanish) has "carried" every number, we add another "*gran uayeb*" of 13 days and arrive at a new set of Year Lords (in 2065), which will be Q'anil (Lamat), Aj (Ben), Tijax (Etnab) and Aq'ab'al (Akbal).

These, then, are the rudiments of the system. It gets a bit more complicated than that. After 260 years, the cardinal direction (east, west, north or south) which begins the series of Year Lords will also undergo a change. But that is beyond the scope of the present article.

Some writers have tried to give the impression that this is an ancient system. This cannot be true. If you project backwards in time, you can see that it was not in use in the ancient days. For one thing, the Chilam Balam books were compiled over several hundred years, and they always use the same Year Lords (Kan, Muluc, Ix and Cauac). Elderly Maya, born more than 52 years ago, always gave me their birth year in accordance with the usual system (Kej, E, No'j or Iq'). There was never the least bit of speculation on their parts that they had actually been born during an entirely different system of Year Lords.

Also, if you project the Gran Uayeb backwards in time, 1519 does not turn out to be a 1 Acatl year, which is how the Aztecs were counting when Cortez arrived in Mexico, and which is why King Moctezuma thought he might be the returning Feathered Serpent.

(By the way, most Aztecs were not that silly. As soon as the prostitutes returned from the ships, they told everyone: "We are absolutely certain that these guys are not gods!" Most people believed them. Moctezuma seems to have suffered from some sort of bipolar personality disorder and had morbid apprehensions about religious matters. But in any case, the Aztecs counted 1519 as 1 Acatl, which would not be true if you were using the Gran Uayeb.)

The Gran Uayeb system may not be ancient, but it is a very elegant and proficient system, most definitely Maya, and should be regarded as part of the intellectual creativity of what is now rapidly emerging as a "Mayan cultural renaissance." The earliest published version of the Gran Uayeb system that I have seen is dated 2008 and appears in a pamphlet called *Concepción Maya del Tiempo y sus Ciclos*, published in Guatemala by the Consejo Maya Junajpu Ixb'alamke. The authors are listed as Virginia Ajxup Pelicó, Macario Santizo López, Pedro Eligio Ajxup Poroj, and Juan Zapil Xivir. Note that most of these are ethnically Mayan names.

But this is probably not the origin of the system. My long time friends from Momostenango inform me that the concepts inherent in the Gran Uayeb were being discussed as long as ten years ago.

So what is the bottom line? Well known Mayan astrological writer Carlos Barrios and several other people have adopted the Gran Uayeb system enthusiastically; they make it sound as if the new system were already firmly established by the Maya. This is not true. Other people throughout Guatemala are still maintaining the ancient count. The people of ultra-traditional Momostenango celebrated the arrival of 1 Iq'on Feb 21 in the traditional way.

At this time, there is no way of knowing how many of the Maya will accept the Gran Uayeb idea. This is something they need to work out for themselves, preferably without the need of "help" from us foreigners.

I hope this clears up some of the confusion.

Is this system ancient? No.

Is it authentically Mayan? Yes.

Has it been universally adopted by the Maya? No.

Is it a topic of lively discussion and debate among them? Yes.

Incidentally, the Gran Uayeb has no influence upon or special relevance to the *tzolk'in*, the ritual calendar of sacred time. It is relevant only to the *haab* (K'iche' 'ab), the measure of ordinary or secular time. It does, however, have an influence on "personal astrology," or "Mayan horoscopes," as it can obviously change the Year Lord of your birth.

But we shall simply have to wait and see what sort of agreement the Mayan people reach among themselves.

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