

The End of Time: The Maya Mystery of 2012. By Anthony Aveni, with a Foreword by Prudence M. Rice. Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2009. Pp. xix, 190. Notes, Glossary, Index. Paperback, \$19.95.

As we move toward December, 2012, many gallons of ink will be spilled and tons of paper used in discussing the implications of the nominal end of the Maya calendrical system. Prof. Anthony Aveni of Colgate University, easily the best known scholar of Mesoamerican archaeoastronomy, in this slim book attempts to de-bunk those who would lead one to believe that cataclysmic events are afoot. The timing of the release of the book is clearly an attempt on the part of Aveni and the University Press of Colorado to get out in front of the controversy with a little light and much reason.

This book is aimed at general readers, and not professionals or others already trained in Mesoamerican culture. The work is divided into eight chapters, the first of which is an amusing introduction. The last is a well conceived conclusion. The book had its origins in a query to Aveni from a young person in England who was truly concerned that his young life might be cut short by the ending of the world predicted by the Maya calendar. Using this epistolary exchange as a point of departure, Aveni analyzes the hype that currently surrounds the topic of the Maya calendar. In the second chapter, he takes a look at the major approaches to 2012 as a harbinger of destruction. Aveni categorizes these according to their major prognostications and principle advocates. For example the first to be considered is the modern Gnostic belief that there is hidden knowledge and that 2012 will provide the key to this knowledge. He sees Geoff Stray as a proponent of this approach, later picked up and popularized by Jose Arguelles. Others included in Aveni's list of 2012 prophecies are John Major Jenkins, Carl-Johan Calleman, and Daniel Pinchbeck, to name a few.

Aveni then uses the third chapter to provide the reader with a quick lesson in Maya calendrics and philosophy, as best we understand it today. The crux of the issue is that the Maya calendar consists of a system of counting the passage of time, day by day. The manner in which this day count is expressed assumes a starting point in 3114 BCE. The calendar also has a point at which it ends, or rolls over, December, 2012. Aveni then looks at one of the predictions offered by modern doomsayers. This prophecy claims that the beginning of the Maya calendar marked an alignment of the universe along the Milky Way. The year 2012 will mark a return to that alignment. Aveni provides three arguments to counter this prophecy. The first is that the data is not at all clear what alignment might have intrigued the Maya. Secondly, their representation of the physical world was far different from the maps and charts of the twentieth century folks analyzing the 2012 event, and so getting into the mind of the Maya on this very basic level is fraught with difficulty. Lastly, there is no credible evidence from the pre-Columbian past that the Maya actually considered the Milky Way as a critical feature let alone imbue it with the power modern folks have read into it. The fourth chapter goes into even greater detail in describing the inner workings of the Maya calendar, and the division of time into days, years, and larger groups of days.

Building on themes from previous chapters, Aveni then begins to look even more closely into issues of astronomy and the Maya. He begins with a series of questions asking if there might be a galactic alignment and might the Maya have known about it or been able to predict

it. Throughout the chapter, he then takes each of these questions and addresses it using our best scientific knowledge. Aveni's status as an accomplished archaeoastronomer figures prominently in this chapter as he musters the most recent astronomical research to his cause. The sixth chapter takes a look at other eschatological belief systems around the world, since many other peoples have predicted the end of times. Included in particular are Christian beliefs and the ideas of the Maya's neighbors, the Aztecs.

The idea of American uniqueness figures at the heart of the seventh chapter. Aveni traces the many different end-of-times scenarios developed in the Americas, from the time of the arrival of the Europeans up until modern days. Numerous sects in the United States have latched upon portents of a coming cataclysm which will destroy the world, including the Mormons and Seventh-Day Adventists. Aveni looks at these and at modern-day movements, including fears of the comet Hale-Bopp and the Y2K furor, as example of this. The eighth chapter provides a summary and conclusion for the whole book. In the end the simple truth about 2012 is that the Maya calendar will roll over and start again, not unlike an automobile odometer when it gets to a series of "9s" rolls over into a new series of "0s."

This is a valuable little book to be enjoyed by specialist and non-specialist. While it does not refute each and every argument, it does provide the reader with a good general introduction to the controversy and a better understanding of just what all the furor is about.

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