BARBARA AND DENNIS TEDLOCK

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The Tedlocks teach at the State University of New York at Buffalo, where Barbara is Distinguished Professor of Anthropology and Dennis is the McNulty Professor of English and Research Professor of Anthropology.

In this interview, the Tedlocks discuss:

Interview transcript

The creation and preservation of texts in the Maya region after the Spanish Conquest

Q: Could you guys talk a little bit about the ways in which Maya writing survived in the Highlands and the lowlands? Who did that? Who preserved these things? How did that come about, and what kinds of things were preserved?

Dennis Tedlock: Well, in both the Highlands and the lowlands, the friars began to teach alphabetic writing to their parishioners and their main purpose was that they wanted help in writing catechisms and confessionals and things like that, in the native languages, even sermons that they could read aloud to their congregations.

But very soon, the people they taught the [alphabetic] writing system began to use that to preserve a knowledge that was being lost because of the destruction of the hieroglyphic books. And that followed slightly different paths in the lowlands and the Highlands. The Highland texts are more narrative, and in the lowlands there's a lot more, kind of, ritual language. But the other thing they realized they had to preserve was the oral tradition, so that's why books like the *Popol Vuh* sound a lot more narrative than a lot of the hieroglyphic texts. The writers of the Highland documents were thinking more of recording what someone who really knew how to read the books would say at length, as an interpreter, and not just someone reading word-for-word. In the lowlands, they seemed to follow more the latter path, at times, of transcribing what was in the [hieroglyphic] books, rather than giving you a full, oral performance as an orator, as a professional reader would do it.

Q: What kinds of things were preserved in the Highlands? What kinds of documents?

Dennis Tedlock: Well, in the Highlands, the *Popol Vuh* starts with the creation of the present world and goes on to tell a long, long story about the gods and how they got the world ready for the present world, ready for human beings. And then by that time, it's almost half over, and then they get around to talking about people, and it quickly moves into history. It eventually comes all the way down to the arrival of the Spaniards and goes about two or three generations past that. The *Annals of the Kakchiqueles* goes all the way into the 18th century, as do the *Chilam Balam* books, in Yucatán.

And in both cases, they kept up the time-keeping system, casting backwards to capture some of the pre-Columbian history and moving it forward, and the whole point is to measure all that by their measure of time, and kind of deemphasize the importance of the arrival of the Europeans. When you read European records vis-à-vis the Mayan ones, it's clear that the Europeans were much more impressed by their arrival than Mayans were!

Q: <Inaudible>

Barbara Tedlock: Yeah, well in the Highlands, there's an unusual text. It's called the '1722'. It's an alphabetic codex, and it's a remarkable document in that it's very similar to the Dresden Codex and to the Paris and the Madrid, except that this one is all alphabetic – but it's done in the same layout as the hieroglyphic texts. And it's taken a long time for people to realize that we really have five codices now, rather than four, and this is the fifth codex. It's written in Quiché Maya, and it turns out to be very important. It has the same kind of astronomical information and calendrical information that the hieroglyphic books have.

Q: How many documents are there in the Highlands and who has them? Where are they and who's in charge of them?

Barbara Tedlock: The different *municipios*, the different town centers, have their own libraries and families keep documents. And we really don't know how many more documents there are. We know that there are many more, but people have to want to show them to the world, and believe that they're not going to be stolen from them, because a lot of the documents have been stolen; have been taken to libraries and things. So, at this point, we don't – how many documents could there be?

Dennis Tedlock: There could be hundreds.

Barbara Tedlock: Hundreds. Yeah.

Dennis Tedlock: So many of the documents have gone out of the country, out of Yucatán and out of here [the Guatemalan Highlands], but-

Barbara Tedlock: Right.

Dennis Tedlock: The famous *Title of the Lords of Totonicapan* for example, Robert Carmack went looking for it, and found that it was still in the possession of the mayor and officers of the town of Totonicapan. They were keeping it very carefully in a wooden box and they let him photograph all the pages. So, it's still where it belongs, but there are a lot of other documents that got carried off to European libraries.

Barbara Tedlock: Documents are very important books, and they are incensed and rolled in cloth and put in wooden boxes for safe keeping. So, people pass these on for generations.

Q: And the people who have these documents, are they sometimes – or are they always, literate? Are they sometimes keeping them in a talismanic way? How are they being used? They preserve these documents; how were they being used?

Dennis Tedlock: Well, I think the individuals who have documents like that can read them all right, but they wouldn't necessarily feel the need to take it out of its box and read from it, because they probably know everything that it says, anyway. So, the document is just to give authority. It's not something that you would stare at and read aloud to somebody who wanted to hear it. People are more likely just to be able to recite – they'll give you an interpretation rather than a sort of verbatim rendition of what it says.

Q: When I talked to you before, you spoke about some of them having a kind of camera literacy. You told the story about finding the 'Monkey Dance' manuscript. Do you recall that?

Dennis Tedlock: Sure. Sometimes the people who have scripts for plays and train the actors – sometimes those people really don't do much reading except for that. In other words, when the manuscript was transmitted to them, they were also shown page-by-page what it – the person transmitting read it to them, so they know exactly where they are in a page, if they feel the need to show you where they are, on which page of a document. But, they may not be people who do much other reading. In other words, they have a direct connection between this particular recital and what's written on a page.

The *Popol Vuh*

Q: Can you talk a little bit about the *Popol Vuh* in particular? What is it? You mentioned a little bit about its story, but how did it come about? And what's in the history of it? Where did it go? Where was it discovered?

Dennis Tedlock: Well, the *Popol Vuh* or *Popol Vuj*, you should say, was written between 1550 and 1554 by people who call themselves 'we' and who are almost certainly the marriage spokesmen or the toastmasters, the masters of ceremonies, for the three leading lineages of the Quiché kingdom. So, this was done 20 some odd years after the conquest, and I think they thought of themselves a little bit like the Hebrews of the Babylonian captivity – the need to get as much information down as they could, because of the loss of books. And they do mention that one of their sources was a book, a hieroglyphic book – and the loss of oral traditions, too, I think.

And so they began at the beginning, with the creation of the present world, and moved on to tell the story of the gods and on into the story of kings who were almost like gods. And at some point, most of the important people in the Quiché kingdom moved south to Chichicastenango. It's only something like 13, 14 kilometers [from the old Quiche capitol of Utatlan, burned by the Spanish]. The Spaniards didn't know anything about this book, but around 1701, when Francisco Ximenez was the parish priest in Quiché or Chuui La, as it's called in Quiché, he got a look at a copy of this manuscript and he made his own copy and made the first Spanish translation. He was very frightened by the book and wrote a preface to it warning the reader that the reader was going to come awfully close to being in contact with the devil. And he wrote a prayer that you were supposed to recite before you began to delve into this book!

In the end though, he treated it like a linguist. He wrote a long grammar of Quiché and he used this text [the Popol Vuh] as an appendix, the same way linguists use stories, native stories as appendices to their grammars. And that he took with him to Rabinal, another place where he served as parish priest. And it stayed there all the way until Guatemalan independence.

Around 1829, 1830, the monastic orders were outlawed, and all their books from their various monasteries and convents were gathered together and taken to Guatemala City, most of them to the University of San Carlos. So, then time goes by, and then in 1856 and '57, first a Viennese and then a French priest, sort of a lay priest [Brasseur de Bourbourg], saw it about a little less than a year apart, and one of them published Ximenez's Spanish translation, Carl Scherzer did that in Vienna. That was kind of fun

because it was under the patronage of the Hapsburgs who had been rulers of New Spain at the time Guatemala was added to it, so that was kind of appropriate. But the person who published the Quiché text was the Frenchman. He returned to Paris and so, in 1861, it was the first time a lot of Europeans got a look at the *Popol Vuh* text, and this time with a French translation.

Q: When we're talking about the *Popol Vuh*, we had some conversation about the role of corn in the *Popol Vuh*- the fact that it's a myth of resurrection. Can you talk a little bit about the maize god theme in there?

Dennis Tedlock: Well, of course there's a controversy about whether it's One Hunahpu or Seven Hunahpu who's the < > of the Maize God – but really the *Popol Vuh* story that comes close to showing you the Maize God is where Xquic or Blood Moon – the mother of the hero Hunahpu and Xbalanque – she's pregnant with twins and she's come to the mother of the father of the twins, an old woman named Xmucane, and this one keeps putting her to test; doesn't believe she's really her daughter-in-law. Thinks the children in her belly might be just anybody's. So, she puts her to a test and says, "If you really are my daughter-in-law, then go to the field and bring back a sack full of corn." And the poor woman goes to the field, and there she sees a single clump of corn with just two ears on it. But she says a prayer invoking the days Anil and Toh and she pulls on the silk at the top of the ear and into her net bag drops a whole load of ears from just that one ear, by her own magic, so she fills the net. She goes back to her mother-in-law who says, "What have you done? I'm gonna' see if you've ripped out everything in our whole field." And so she goes to look for herself and she sees at the foot of the cornstalk, the imprint of the net and the word for net is *k'at* and she says, "Now I know," she goes back and says, "Now I know that you really are my daughter-in-law and that you really are carrying my grandsons in your womb, because I saw the sign of it, there in the field." And the reason she was able to see that as a sign is that in the Venus calendar, the first time Venus rises as the morning star, it does on the day Hunahpu, which is the name of the father and uncle of the twins- the twin heroes. And the next time Venus rises, this signifies the coming to life of the hero twins as a kind of almost a rebirth of their father and uncle. That happens on the day 'net', so that's how she sees the imprint- as if it were a hieroglyph, she sees the imprint of the 'net' and says, "Now I know. This is the second coming."

The Rabinal Achi dance drama

Q: Let's talk a little bit about the Rabinal Achi as a document and its story- its history and how it came about.

Dennis Tedlock: The most interesting thing about the Rabinal Achi play is that it's the only Mayan dance drama performed today in which Europeans have no role. All the characters in it lived their lives a hundred, maybe two hundred years before Europeans arrived. And it's a wonder that the play survived at all. There were attempts to suppress it because the Spaniards, the missionaries especially, didn't like the preservation of the memory of the pre-Colombian past. And they preferred plays that contained a prophecy of some sort that legitimized the Spanish conquest, or that was already a play about the saints that they themselves had introduced – that kind of thing. So, here was a play in which there were no Europeans, about events that happened in the past, at a time when there were all these independent Mayan kingdoms. So of course the Spaniards saw that as politically dangerous, to recall the memory of time when the whole scene wasn't dominated by Europeans. And between about 1590 and 1770, plays like the Rabinal were rather popular and popped up all over the country again and again. And the reason we know this is that the records show 20 or 30 attempts to ban them. Anyway, Rabinal was the last place where they managed to keep doing this –

Barbara Tedlock: And they still do—

Dennis Tedlock: -and do it today. And it's about the capture and sacrifice of a warrior; not a traditional enemy of the Rabinals, but the whole play's about a quarrel between them and the Quiché kingdom. They used to be loyal to the Quiché kings, but they were betrayed by the son of one of the kings who raised a whole army against them. And the play's about the capture of that person. And it reveals many interesting things, one of which is that captives were put on trial. This was not just a sacrifice, as it's being called over and over again, but the play reveals that these warriors who were captured by Mayan kings were put on trial. They were accused of every past wrong against their captors that their captors could think of. And probably blamed for things that their fathers and grandfathers [did].

The captives that Maya royalty won in their warfare and held over – the play reveals they were put on trial. They weren't simply readied for sacrifice. It's the Europeans that started emphasizing that idea, and they've been emphasizing it ever since and ignoring the judicial dimension. These were enemies. These were prisoners of war, but not just any old prisoner of war, but prisoners of war whose fathers and grandfathers had a

history of violence against the kingdom of their capturers. So, these people – these captives were put on trial and in the play, the captive freely admits to all his past wrongs against the Rabinal people, even somewhat proudly because he knows – he's getting fatalistic about this. He knows that he's going to be sacrificed at the end of it. But, the whole thing is not just making food for the gods out of him, as we hear so often in the Mesoamerican literature, but putting an end to this member of the enemy lineage. And actually in this case, the captive himself talks as if he would like to exterminate the entire – he talks of his failure to exterminate the royal line of his capturers down to the last man! And instead, ending up being done in by them.

But he warns them, alluding to the story of the *Popol Vuh*, where the hero twins avenge the death of their fathers. He says things that make a comparison between them and the lords of Xibalba. He says that his sons or his grandsons will remember him; will never forget that he died at their hands.

Q: In the performance of the play, there are a number of elements that are pre-conquest, visual, musical and so forth, and then there are some things that came in after the conquest, and a few things that have been introduced in recent years. Can you sort out some of those different elements?

Dennis Tedlock: Perhaps the oldest thing in the play is that the royal persons on both sides wield a little axe in their right hand and a small shield in the left. And those are two emblems of lordship that are all over classic art again and again; whenever you see somebody wielding the so-called mannikin scepter, you'll always see in the other hand a shield or sometimes something that looks like a bow guard. And here the Highland Maya were clearly using those things right down to the time of the conquest. And, in the case of the Rabinal Achi, are using them in this drama in 2004, 2005 and on into the future from there.

Q: What are the other elements?

Dennis Tedlock: Let's see. What else? The calendar's mentioned several times. Probably earlier versions of the script probably had specific day names in it, but they do mention the 13 times 20 days a number of times.

Q: I was thinking of dress, back racks, musical instruments –

Dennis Tedlock: Oh, yes.

Barbara Tedlock: Yes. The tuun.

Dennis Tedlock: Oh, of course. The music is provided by a split drum and two trumpets. And there's one section of the Bonampak murals that shows a group of musicians with the same three instruments. The trumpets now are sort of elongated bugles made out of brass, but we know as late as the 18th century, they were still using wooden trumpets, just like the ones in the Bonampak murals. So, there's the story of the music. And then there are two characters, they carry their symbol of office on their backs, instead of with masks. In Mayan languages, your job, your duty and your position is compared to a load you carry around on your back. And these two, one of them carries a carving with a pair of jaguars and the other, a pair of eagles. And very similar dancers can be found on classic Maya pots, usually in pairs; usually they're dressed just alike, as the Rabinal dancers are, except for the difference in the animals they carry on their backs. And they're also similar in that they're not masked – that everything that identifies them in some particular character in a drama is on their backs.

Q: How do we know that all these elements – the back racks, the costume and the – these things weren't picked up – knowing what's been found out about the Maya, how do we know that they go back that far?

Dennis Tedlock: Well, of course the people of Rabinal were first seen using those things in the middle of the 19th century and even today, most of them have never seen pictures of classic art.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about the role of the director and music and the guardian of that text?

Dennis Tedlock: All the dance dramas, including Rabinal Achi have a person who owns the manuscript, if there's a script. He's sort of a combined producer and director. He trains the actors; he reads their lines to them until they can read them back from memory. He gets all the costumes together; he gets sponsors to help with the expenses. In the case of the Rabinal Achi, for sometime now that's been a man named Jose Leon Coloch. And because one of the parts has so many lines and he has trouble finding actors who can memorize them all, he usually plays the leading role himself. And by the way, that's one of the strangest things about that play is the leading character is actually the enemy who is sacrificed. He's the whole center of interest – the protagonist in a certain sense. The whole play centers around that character, so in this case, the director takes that part, too.

Q: What is the point of the performance of the play? Is it play performed to entertain audiences? When is it performed? Why is it performed? Where is it performed?

Barbara Tedlock: It's a religious duty to perform the play. And before it's performed, people do a lot of customs. They burn a lot of copal, and they go up in the mountain to a shrine, and people actually train for a year for the part. It's a duty, and they're dancing to feed the gods. They don't care about the audience. It's not performed for a human audience. That's not important. What is important is that they do this as an offering, and it is a yearlong service. It's a lot of work.

The 260 day Tzolkin calendar

Q: Great. Barbara, I want to talk a little bit about the calendar system, about the Tzolkin. First of all, what is the Tzolkin? Why is it 260 days? How is it used for divination by the ancient Maya, what we know from their books, and how is it used for divination now?

Barbara Tedlock: Okay. What's come to be called the Tzolkin – that's an invented term based on Yucatec Maya. [In the Guatemala Highlands] it's called a *Rahil Bahir*, it's the circle of days. It's 260 days long. It's based on the human gestation period, and it has to do when a woman recognizes that she's pregnant, to when she gives birth. Okay? And that's approximately 260 days.

It's also the period of time for a particular variety of corn that's grown frequently here in the Highlands of Guatemala. And so if you plant on a particular day in the calendar, you will harvest on that day name again, 260 days later. Part of that is accomplished by doubling over the corn cane; you double it over and what happens is that the kernels get all of the wonderful juice and it ripens it rapidly, so that they make sure that it's ready in 260 days.

And that particular calendar is the basis for all the other calendars. It's the oldest calendar among the Maya and everything else was built on that – the 365-day, the long count and whatnot. And this calendar is only known in Mesoamerica; nowhere else in the world. It's an interesting calendar because of the combination of human gestation and the corn gestation, so that the corn crop is going to come due in 260 days and the baby is ready in 260 days. So, the women's cycle is at the very center of the calendar and calendar knowledge, which is why the midwives are all trained in calendars and calendar day names, and they know the astronomy and whatnot.

Q: Great. How did the preservation of the calendar in the Highlands come about?

Barbara Tedlock: Yeah. Preservation of culture is always a miracle, and it's also commonsensical, both. The calendar exists, that 260-day calendar is used actively in many, many communities, perhaps 85 communities today. And the reason for it is that is it's easy to remember; it's passed down; it fits into the very culture of the people; it fits into agriculture; it fits into spinning, weaving, everything about their lives.

It's not a piece of culture that's just in your head. It's something that you use, and I think that's part of why it has lasted so well. Also, it's lasted so well because it does not conflict with our calendar, the 365-day calendar. There's no overlap between the Gregorian calendar and the 260-day calendar. So, we're going to have *Wajxaqib Batz* tomorrow, Eight Monkey tomorrow. Eight Monkey will not happen again, on this particular day in the Gregorian calendar for a long time. It'll actually happen again nine months from now. It'll be a different season of the year and whatnot. So, because the calendar was so different from the introduced calendar, I think it maintained itself better. The introduced calendar is 365 days long and there is a Mayan calendar that that's long, but it's harder for people to remember because, I think, of the conflict of calendars.

The role of the daykeeper in a Highland Maya community

Q: Can you tell us what is a daykeeper and how are they trained? How are they initiated? What do they do?

Barbara Tedlock: Yeah. A daykeeper, an *ajk'ij* is a person who is trained in the calendar and what the calendar's all about. It is the first level of training; both men and women are trained as *ajk'ij*. It is very lucky for a couple to be trained together. They prefer if they can train a couple together, so that the knowledge will be maintained among them. The calendar daykeepers use the calendar – each day has its own characteristics, and they use the characteristics of the day to prognosticate, to work with the day. To think, okay: if this is a day in which people could get angry easily, well, let's not get angry today. Let's remember that, all day long, so that we don't get angry today. Or, if this is a day in which things make you crazy, let's not get crazy. Or, if this is a day like a *noch* day, a thought day, it's a good creative day; let's work on a new design for a blanket or a weaving. So, you work with the calendar days, and I think because of that, that maintains it too, because it's practical. You wake up in the morning and think, well, what will I do with today? What's today's characteristics? What's the face of today?

And then you work with that and you don't become fatalistic. You don't say, "Oh, this is a bad day." You just say, "Okay. There's a tendency toward anger today, therefore, I won't get angry." Or a particular day has to do with money, then it's maybe a good day to pay your bills, or you think about money issues.

Q: What are the responsibilities of the daykeeper in the community?

Barbara Tedlock: A daykeeper is a person who pays attention to each and every day; makes offerings of copal incense and candles at shrines; remembers how to work with particular days. Daykeepers heal people. They take them to – particularly on "one" days – they take them to a shrine for healing, and they also interpret dreams. If someone presents you with a dream and you're trained as a daykeeper, you must stop everything you're doing. If you're walking down the path and someone says, "I had a dream. It troubles me." – you stop; you listen to the dream and you interpret it and you go on your way. You don't not do it! So, a daykeeper does dream interpretation; a daykeeper works with the characteristics of the day, and maintains the culture; maintains the history.

Daykeepers can be initiated at higher levels later. You can learn how to be a midwife, a bone setter, there's different specialties, but you can't go there until you know the calendar.

Q: What is the initiation of a daykeeper? The training and the initiation…

Barbara Tedlock: The training is a period of time. It's 260 days long and it's a time in which you meet with your teacher quite regularly, either at your teacher's house or at your own house. And the teacher tells you about the day, what the day is like. The teacher goes to the shrine. You don't go to the shrine until you're initiated, but the teacher goes and visits the shrine and makes offerings for you; talks to the people there. You present your dreams every day to the teacher and the teacher decides, each day, is this going well or not? Am I going to initiate this person or is this not an acceptable person? So, you live this 260 day period with some trepidation because you're not sure if it's going to work or not.

And then the big day comes, which is today – *wu kutzi* (sp?) and there's a ceremony in the teacher's house for you. And a large pot, an *olla* that the teacher has that's new is broken. And it's your head; it's the world; it's everything about you; it's your past; it's your future. And then these four pieces of potsherds are taken to shrines the next day and placed in various places. That's when you're introduced to the shrine. And so that's what happens. And so, in other words, your head, your whole life is broken; it's

changed. You're a new person and you're distributed to the cosmos and you'll never be the same after that.

The religious and political structure of the town of Momostenango

Q: Could you guys talk a bit about Momostenango; how the place is organized; lineages and shrines and sort of the structure – review what the place is about. And why is Momos unusual in the way that it is?

Barbara Tedlock: Momostenango is very well organized, in terms of the traditional Mayan community. It's a community that's filled with patrilineages. And the patrilineages still live on the lands that they've always lived on, therefore they've kept the organization. And the patrilineages – there's about 300 of them. Nobody knows the exact number.

And they have traditional lineages that they marry into. So, Xilojs marry into Peruchas, or they marry into different groups. This actually simplifies the choice of a spouse. It both simplifies it and it gives you some ideas about who might be interesting. You know, this could be somebody over there in Abaj who is very attractive or something like that. And the community itself has these patrilineages and the structures very much intact. As a result, they can pass on tradition through the patrilineages, instead of getting confused with other things that come in from the outside.

So, in the town there are all of these people who were trained as daykeepers. You're trained within a patrilineage (we were trained in Andres Xiloj's patrilineage). You learn your customs within that patrilineage; you learn your rights and responsibilities. And within the patrilineages, there are different levels of knowledge; different levels of leaders. There's a Chuchkajaw – and a Chuchkajaw means a mother/father, and Angel [Angel Xiloj, son of Andres and our host on the afternoon of this interview] is a Chuchkajaw for the lineage. It means that he looks over all of the members of the lineage, makes offerings for them, educates them, cares for their children, and knows what his duties are.

The Chuchkajaws of the different lineages meet together from time-to-time to discuss things. If they need something to be done about the road; if they need something about schooling. They're very keen on schooling now. That's a very important topic. And so they meet together and they decide. They help select one another as the head

Chuchkajaw for a lineage. When the head Chuchkajaw dies, then they have to get together, a group of people from other lineages, to decide which person should be the head of this particular lineage.

Within the patrilineages then, there's an organization of knowledge. The heads of the patrilineages are male, they're not female, and they are organized to help another to pass on tradition; to educate one another; to talk to the central government for the community.

Then there's not only the patrilineages, but there's another structure within the town, the *aldayas*, and the *aldayas* – there are four main subdivisions in the community and there are many patrilineages in those four main *aldaya* structures. And each one of those four has a main Chuchkajaw, a *Chuchkajaw rech aldaya*, and Andres Xiloj was the *Chuchkajaw rech aldaya* for this Santa Isabelle *aldaya*, where we're situated right now. And they meet together and they help to select the *Chuchkajaw rech tinamit* – the mother/father of the entire community. And there are two of them; the community's divided into two different parts and these two are the top leaders of the community, so it's a very well organized structure of knowledge and responsibilities.

Q: Could you talk about the shrines—

Barbara Tedlock: Right. And the shrines – like where we're going to go tomorrow, Chuti Sabal – Chuti Sabal has burning places, and each different lineage has has its own burning place, and you know where you're gonna' do your offerings. We'll be going with Angel to his lineage shrine and we all make our offerings there because it's the Xiloj shrine, among all the other shrines. So, you know where you go. And then the next day, we go up the hill a little bit to another set of shrines and the lineages are marked out there, too, in a sense. So, you know where you belong and it reinforces the family structure all the way down to the bottom. So, when they initiate young people or they bring in foreigners like us, they bring us in within a lineage structure. We're not just added on helter-skelter. So, we have a responsibility to that lineage.

The ceremonial day Wajxaqib Batz

Q: What happens on *Wajxaqib Batz*?

Barbara Tedlock: Okay. What happens on *Wajxaqib Batz*? *Wajxaqib Batz* is 8 Monkey, and this is the most important day in the 260 day calendar. It's the day when

you introduce your new *ajk'ij* to the shrines where they will burn for the rest of their lives. And it's a day in which anybody who has been initiated should come back to the shrine and make offerings at the shrine to renew their connection to these sacred places, and talk to all of their ancestors at the shrine. And it's a coming together. There will be people who come from many miles to come here, and other people are local. And they come to the particular shrines and what they do is they burn incense; they burn tallow candles and they burn wax candles. And the wax candles are for the deities in the sky and the tallow are for the ancestors and for the earth. You use the burning of the candles and the burning of the incense as a way to communicate with the world, with the *mundo*.

Q: The conversation that we had, we were talking about the nature of books and the importance of books –

Barbara Tedlock: The altar is a book.

Q: Could you talk about that?

Barbara Tedlock: On *Wajxaqib Batz*, 8 Monkey, people go and pray at the shrines and they put their words there, and that is the book. It's basically all of those hundreds of thousands of words are there, and you put your word in there, and you become part of the book of the tradition of the community. And that's what's going on, and that's why you pray there. Some people think you're praying to nothing, but no. You're praying and you're putting your word into the book of the shrine and it's the history of all of these people that you know.

Dennis Tedlock: Everything that was ever said there is recorded there. They compare it to a library or an archive. All of it is on deposit there.

Barbara Tedlock: Right. For all time. So, all the words that were uttered there are still there.

Q: I would like to try another take at that. We left the fact of it being a shrine a long time ago.

Barbara Tedlock: Oh, okay. Needs to be – So, at Chuti Sabal there's shrines there for the different lineages. And the different lineage shrines contain all of the words ever spoken. They're whole libraries of words by all the people who've come, burnt copal incense, burnt candles and prayed. And so there, you build this enormous library.

The importance of books for the modern Maya

Q: You had spoken before about the importance of having a book, whether it's a book you read or not – "I have that somewhere at home in a book—"

Barbara Tedlock: Oh, yes. It's the fact of the book.

Dennis Tedlock: Well, a lot of people, whether they possess an important book or not, feel they should have one, and it almost doesn't matter, but sometimes it might turn out to be an old catechism. It might be some kind of record of the family. Every once in a great while, it might turn out to be a very old manuscript. Who knows? But people sometimes who tell you things, stories, myths and tales and legends, or things about their own history, may say to you, "Well, I have that all at home in a book." And that's because there's this notion that, ideally, all that stuff should be documented.

And what's interesting about that, then, in the long run, is that through thick and thin, through the destruction of the hieroglyphic books; through the fact that only until recently could Quiché people get a copy of the *Popol Vuh*, including the Quiché text – that's only been very recent that they've had access to that. So, there's been all this blockage, this deprivation, but still this desire, this notion that all things, all kinds of knowledge and authority, really should have their foundation in a book of some kind. It should be on paper.

Barbara Tedlock: So, they're bibliophiles.

Dennis Tedlock: And people who do have books, put them on the altars. They don't put them on bookshelves. The books belong – important books belong on an altar.

Q: Where do you think that comes from? Do you think that goes back to the ancient writing and carries straight forward?

Dennis Tedlock: Certainly that goes all the way back to this memory, through generations, back to the time of the hieroglyphic books. And all of the Mayan languages, no matter how close or how far they are from the languages in which the surviving hieroglyphic texts were written, all of them have in common certain words that mean paper; that mean book; that mean writing. So they didn't get notions about books and writing from the arrival of Europeans. It's part of the culture, straight through.

The role of the scribe in ancient Maya society

Q: Thank you. Among the ancient Maya, who were the scribes?

Barbara Tedlock: Among the ancient Maya, the scribes were both men and women, and they were the nobility. This makes them unusual in that to be a scribe is not to be a craftsperson. It's not a lower skill. It is considered the highest possible skill to be a scribe. We have very good evidence of both men and women scribes from the pots.

Q: How do we know that there were women scribes? What evidence is there for that?

Dennis Tedlock: There are some classic vases that show scribes who are clearly women. They're identifiable either because they have writing instruments stuck in their hair, or there's one lady who has writing all around the hem of her dress. And there are women shown in the act of writing, on one of those rim texts that I'm remembering. So that's what that evidence looks like. And then also in this question of who the scribes were, it seems that they were all members of royal families. But I'm guessing for the most part they were people who were unlikely to accede to the highest position. They might be second or third sons or daughters, second or third born or whatever, rather than the people who were in direct line for being the Lord of the whole polity of some sort. But, there were probably some of those top people, too, who were scribes. But I'm guessing the people who took a real interest in it were the ones who knew they had to have other things to do than take over some kind of political role.

Q: Being an elite literary culture, how does that compare with other cultures? Who had literacy in other ancient cultures?

Dennis Tedlock: Well, you know, of course, the scribes in the ancient Middle East were all kind of lowly bureaucrats – let's say they were middle class - – but writing was associated with craft skills. But a more interesting case might be that of fifth century Athens, which is held up as this first society that gloried in alphabetic writing, and lots of people knew how to write. Well in fact, women were not taught how to write. Non-citizens were not taught how to write. And people of the uppermost classes were not taught how to write. They memorized text in school rather than learning how to write them, because writing was a lowly craft. You might get ink on your hand. Or if you used a chisel, you might get marble dust on your hands or something - – a lowly craft skill.

So the Mayas really contrast with that. And then the whole notion that Athens had a higher level of literacy, when you subtract the slaves and the women and the upper classes and foreigners – all the resident foreigners were not taught to write either – really, it was a very small segment of society that knew how to write. And perhaps not all that larger a group of people that knew how to write than in some of the great Mayan cities of the classic period.

Barbara Tedlock: Another thing that we're figuring out is that among the ancient Maya, there were different levels of literacy. Some of the hieroglyphs were painted differently, and were simplified, and were on the outside of buildings, and were painted very large, so that more people could read them and understand them, whereas the hieroglyphs in the books are much more esoteric and complicated. So there were different levels of literacy.

Q: What was the language of the hieroglyphic text, or the languages?

Barbara Tedlock: Your turn.

Dennis Tedlock: Well, the epigraphers are all convinced that the texts were only written in Chol in the classic period, and then in the post-classic, Yucatec came into play.

There's some problems with that. Among the alphabetic books written by Mayans, the *Popol Vuh* has about ten times as much about books, and writing, and what they were for, and what people did with them, than any other source. So, clearly, some kinds of books were in use there. Francisco Jimenez collected divinatory books in the early 18th century, very close to the same time that we know books were still in use in the Lowlands and in Tayasal – that last Mayan kingdom in the Peten.

Barbara Tedlock: And those were hieroglyphic books, and we know that.

Was there ever hieroglyphic writing in the Guatemala Highlands?

Dennis Tedlock: The fact that we don't have any surviving hieroglyphic books from the Highlands is not very impressive since there are only three altogether anyway that come from Yucatán. So that's not a very good sample of the base, for a whole theory about who was writing and who wasn't. And then, of course, we have the embarrassment for people who have the “Chol only and Yucatec only” theory, of the Quiché the codex, the 1722 codex that Barbara was talking about, which is the only alphabetic document that has exactly the form and shape and proportions of a hieroglyphic book.

Barbara Tedlock: And the same information as a hieroglyphic book has. And it's not a copy or a translation of an existing hieroglyphic book. It is simply a hieroglyphic book that was written using the alphabet. But it's written in Quiché Maya.

Q: That's a little confusing…

Barbara Tedlock: Yeah. The 1722 has the same shape, size, proportion, information, as any hieroglyphic book has. It has the calendar information. It has astronomy, information about the days. And this particular book is the only book we have that's just like a codex, but that happens to be alphabetic.

Q: You spoke the other night about the texts of Copan, and believing that those were not the written in Cholti, or in a Chol language. Can you talk about that?

Dennis Tedlock: Yeah, I wouldn't want to make any big bets on what languages other than Cholan might turn up at Copan. But I've always suspected that some of the sites where the decipherments aren't very impressive – and I must say that there are plenty of texts at Copan that when you look at what the epigraphers have done with them so far, there are a lot of gaps. And at Copan and other sites where that's the case, where we just don't have long, clear readings the way we have at Palenque, for example, one begins to suspect that maybe one of the reasons that those texts aren't coming as clear as they might is that maybe they weren't written in Chol or Yucatec after all. Maybe they're at least partly in some other Mayan language.

Storytelling style among the ancient and modern Maya

Q: Can we talk a bit about characteristics of Maya rhetoric and style, what you've found in the ancient texts and modern characteristics of Mayan speech and story telling, for example the use of couplets?

Dennis Tedlock: Well, one thing the hieroglyphic texts share in common with the alphabetic ones written after the conquest is their poetic structure. A lot of the hieroglyphic texts seem very condensed. And I suspect that people who read them aloud knew how to supply missing parts. But a few of them, some of the lintels at Yaxchilan, have very clear structure, poetic structure with parallelism. At Palenque, the text is so tight that you wonder, maybe they just felt they had a limited space or something. They didn't really expand on the poetry as much as they did at some other sites. But the

alphabetic texts are full of parallelism, groups of phrases in twos, sometimes threes, sometimes fours, sometimes longer series, and then with single lines that aren't parallel, that mark transitions or the beginning of a statement.

One of the things you will hear people saying at shrines on days like *Waxakib Batz* are a series of phrases like, *"neen hu'u, chuti hu'u, neena taka, chuti taka"* - – big mountain, little mountain, big plain or valley, little plain or valley, series of parallel phrases like that. But sometimes they'll come in threes as well, and with all kinds of variations. There are professional prayer makers who ring all kinds of changes on these poetic structures. I'm not thinking of a lot of good lines….

Q: What about punning? The role of punning in the ancient text. That might not be for humor, it might be for religious or esoteric purposes...

Dennis Tedlock: Yes, well, for example, Angel [Maya daykeeper Angel Xiloj, interviewed earlier the same day] was explaining the meanings of some of the days by using sound plays.

Barbara Tedlock: "*Batz', kabatz'inik* [to spin], *botz'oj* [winding], *tz'onoj* [asking]", those are all sounds plays. Those are all puns on the day name *batz'*. But it elaborates the meaning. So "*kabatz'inik tz'onoj*," these are words that expand it and that talk about winding things up, and that give you a whole meaning. Okay? [Angel spoke about Batz' days as being good days for bringing things to completion.] So, in other words, by having a series of puns, you can create a text, a gorgeous text. And it's done today orally, and it's clearly in the hieroglyphic books as well, and on the lintels and the stelae.

Dennis Tedlock: Another example, when he was talking about *"b'elejeb E'* [the day 9 E']. *Ri be, ri utzilaj be* [the road, the good road]". *Be* means road. It's a pun on the day name *E'*. ["On this day", said Angel, "one asks for a good road, a good destiny..."]

Barbara Tedlock: *E', be*.

Q: Also, the issue is the role that the texts have in ancient and modern Maya culture; that, for example, in Yaxchilan, there are texts and lintels that clearly are not pretty much written to be read by human beings, maybe just for the Gods. And some of the written texts now seem to have a similar function. Could you talk about that comparison?

Barbara Tedlock: Well, it's like the performance of the Rabinal Achi: just because you have a text, it's not necessarily written for a human audience. You know, words are sacred. A text can be written for the deities, and addressed to the deities, and can be written in hidden places that other humans aren't going to see. But the text will be there.

Q: Dennis, could you talk a little bit about your experience of translation and your attitudes about translation of Maya text, your experience in working with the Rabinal Achi, probably working with Maya to help clarify these things, and also about the issue of translation versus transliteration, for example. Like, what you do as somebody who is more closely aligned with poetry than with decipherment. With what the epigraphers have done. And maybe also a little bit about the book, which I think you're calling *Two Thousand Years of Maya Literature* that's coming, the sort of tack you're taking there.

Dennis Tedlock: In translating the "*Popol Vuh*" I wanted to find a contemporary speaker of Quiché who would have a lot of esoteric knowledge. I didn't know that I would end up looking for an *ajk'ij* and a person who was a Chuchkajaw. But I thought I would learn a lot more about the text, and be able to translate it better, if I went through the whole text with contemporary speakers of the language. And I did that primarily with Andres Xiloj. And some of the things he thought about the text seemed far-fetched, but other things seemed right on target and in surprising ways.

There was one passage that turned out to be funny, and no one had ever recognized that there were jokes in it. But he recognized the puns in that text. And he realized immediately - for example, the story of Hunahpu and Xbalanque avenging the death of their father. At the end of that story, the *Popol Vuh* talks about honoring Hunahpu and Hun Hunahpu. And Andre said he didn't even recognize it, that was the foundation of the custom of honoring ancestors still followed today. On days named Hunahpu, people go to the cemeteries to burn offerings, and make prayers to their ancestors, to this day. He didn't know that story, because it was lost. But he immediately recognized, "Here is the story that explained why we do this!"

So it was really very exciting, those kinds of moments. And he was even able to elaborate on some passage and say, "Oh, that's just like what we say in some of the prayers." And he could even suggest lines that weren't in the text that would be perfectly at home there.

Then, in the case of the translating the Rabinal Achi, there you can get even closer to someone who really knows the text, in this case the director/producer of the play, could recite the entire play without even looking at the script. And he plays the leading role.

So I went through it with him. Even at a time when they weren't performing the play, he was willing to recite for me the parts as he would teach them to the actors. So I have recordings of him doing the parts out of context. Fortunately, by 1998, I was able to actually go, and Barbara and I made two videos of the entire play. And so we had that to study and compare to. And that's what permitted me to write stage directions in doing the translation. And the distance between the languages as they're spoken today and as they were spoken at the time of the *Popol Vuh* is no greater, let's say, than the distance between us and Elizabethan English. So some things are difficult, and we have to learn esoteric things about Shakespeare. But other things are quite transparent. So that's kind of the degree of difficulty that's involved here. But if you go to someone like a Chuchkajaw, who has all this religious knowledge and knows all this very ancient prayer language, you shorten the distance, because some of that language he knows in his own prayers is almost the equivalent of Elizabethan English.

The role of the various Maya languages, and an understanding of modern Maya beliefs and practices, in developing a full understanding of the hieroglyphic texts

Q: Thank you. What is your sense of where the future of the decipherment lies? What will be coming up in the future in terms of understanding of Maya literature and interpretation of Maya literature?

Barbara Tedlock: The first thing that I think will happen is that we will begin to recognize that there are several Mayan languages that contribute to hieroglyphic study, and that we will recognize that the cities are international. We already know they're international, but that you have to know several different Maya languages. Floyd Lounsbury. my teacher, was always explaining how, if you don't know Kekchi Maya, there's a lot you can't understand about Copan, same thing with Cakchiquel. You really need to know those languages. And I think that that's going to be the direction of the future is people are going to realize that we're not dealing with one particular small group of languages, but that there's going to be an opening up of, wow, my goodness, there's words from several different Mayan languages. And that will be very exciting as we learn about that. That's what I think is going to happen. What do you think, Dennis?

Dennis Tedlock: What the epigraphers need to think about, too, is when you're looking for ethnographic analogs to what the ancient Mayan did, if they want to learn something from people who still use the word *ahau* which is so permanent in the hieroglyphic texts,

they're going to have to look at how the word *ahau* Is used in the Highland languages: Quiché, Cakchiquel, all of them. In Yucatec, they don't even know what *ahau* means today. The same thing in Chol, actually. But all the other languages still actively use this word in many different senses. And right here in Momostenango, they pray to the lords of each day. Each day has a Lord, an *ahau*. And they know that important people can be called *ahau*. And it's directly related to the words in these language for "father," which are quite different in Yucatec. They [Yucateans] don't connect up with the concept of *ahau* at all.

And this is where the calendar is. There are all these scores of communities in the Guatemalan Highlands, they're using the calendar, not just the 260, but some of them keep the solar aspect of the calendar as well. This is where that kind of knowledge still exists. This is where there are organized patrilineages. This is where a new head of a lineage has to be trained and initiated by a member of some other lineage. When the epigraphers see that in the inscriptions, that someone came on the occasion of the installation of a new lord, they assume that means that this new lord was subordinate to the people who were installing him.

Barbara Tedlock: That's not the case.

Dennis Tedlock: And that doesn't have to be the case. If you pay attention to the contemporary structures here in the Guatemalan Highlands, any head of lineage, and that's what those ancient words were, has to be - – if the one who was the head is dead, the new one has to be installed, has to be legitimized by the living head of some neighboring lineage. That's just the way it works. And there's no subordination implied by that.

Q: Barbara, maybe you can speak to this. The ways in which ethnography and particularly the understanding of native astronomy has helped our understanding of these hieroglyphic texts. I think particularly of your working out of the notion of the “Three Stone Place” and Orion.

Barbara Tedlock: A lot of astronomy, yeah. In order to understand ancient Mayan astronomy, it's very important to know ethnoastronomy, the current astronomy. And in Momostenango, there's a great deal of knowledge about the stars and about the three stones, the hearth place, which is in Orion. And I discovered that, when I was doing my ethnography here, that there's actually three stones up in Orion, and there is a smudge in between, which is what we call M42. And this particular fact was very important, it turned out, to some of the epigraphers, particularly Linda Schele, who suddenly

discovered, oh, my goodness, it looks like we're dealing with the same part of Orion. And she figured out that the three hearthstones must be what was going on. So she did sort of a back translation from modern ethnoastronomy.

So if you learn from living people what they know about the sky, there's a lot of hints there for the past. This particular example is taken from Highland Guatemala, in Momostenango, and has been translated for Palenque among other places. And that's another example of how ethnography is very useful to epigraphers, to archaeologists. It's very worthwhile to know the knowledge that's still around today, and not to get mixed up and say, "Oh, well that's Highland, that won't work, because Palenque's Lowland," not to get caught up on these strange concepts that we created ourselves.

Mayan people don't believe there's Highland Mayan and Lowland Mayan. They don't separate themselves that way. That's a scholarly problem. So, therefore, if you don't pay attention to the difference in Highland and Lowland, and you just pay attention to what's here now, what you can learn where, you can go some distance to unlocking some of the pre-Colombian secrets.

The mechanics of a divination ceremony

[Interview continues after filming of divination performed by Angel Xiloj]

Q: Barbara, could you describe the mechanics, the process of the divination – like the divination we just saw, but not referring to that one specifically. And how it relates to the calendar; how the calendar is involved in it; how the continuity of the ancient Maya calendar is implicit in the process of divination.

Barbara Tedlock: In a Mayan divination, the calendar is used. Every diviner has a *baraj*, which is a group of crystals and *tz'ite* seeds. They begin by praying to the bundle, because the bundle will give them the answers, and they pray to it; and then they empty out and select the crystals. The larger ones go in front, and then there's a row of crystals in front of the diviner; and then there are these red and black *tz'ite* seeds, which the diviner mixes and then grabs a handful of, and puts the handful aside, and puts away the ones he didn't grab. And then it's that handful that he arranges. And he mixes them; prays to them; prays to the sky; and then puts them in rows across the table. And they're in groups of four, until you get near the end. You either have four, or three, or two, or one at the end, in your last pile. And the calendar is counted out, and so you begin with

today, or you begin with a particular day, connected to the person that you're going to divine for.

It could be *keb-noj* – and then you count through *noj, tijax, kawoq*, etcetera, all the way across, down, all the way through. And you arrive at a final day name; you talk to that day; and you may be interrupted part way through – your body may speak. His did. a couple of times. Your body speaks, and then you're interrupted, and then you go back and you question that day. "What are you saying to me, this day?" This day wants to speak. And then you go all the way through, and you arrive at your final stack of seeds, which is anywhere from one to four; and the result, if the last is one seed, it's not as certain as it is if it's two seeds, or if it's four seeds. And so you get to the last result, and then you count through all the way over again, in that same setting. Now you've got two counts through the first setting of the calendar.

And then you put it all back together again, and then you grab once again and you get a handful, and you're gonna get a different number of piles of seeds for the calendar days. And so you count through those and you get that result and at any point, you may ask the client a question, because something occurs to you about that day and what's speaking to you, and you can ask the client, "Well, tell me about *noj*. You go too fast. You're not slow enough. You don't consider things. You're not thoughtful enough," or whatever. And then – so you count through that one and then you count it again. You put it together. What happens is you do it four times and that normally gives you a set of answers. But, at any point, you talk to the client and you figure out other things and you may have other questions for the client. And the client will tell you something, which then fits into this narrative that you're creating with the calendar and the seeds. So, it's a narrative you create between yourself, the diviner, and the client. And so you go through and you do it four times. And then at that point, you'll tell them something about how it came out. You'll say, perhaps, "Well, you have another question for me, or something – a follow-up question on this?" And if the person does, then you go through the whole process again with the follow-up question. If the person says, "No, that's fine with me. That's good enough." The diviner can then say, "But I think I would like to talk to you about something." And then the diviner could lead you and do it. Usually they go through two different sets of four, to make it a complete divination.

Q: Could you go a little further into – are we talking just about the 20 day names of the calendar or the day names in association with the number cycle?

Barbara Tedlock: It's the days and their numbers. Let's say that your first number is 8 Monkey. Okay? So, you have 8 Monkey and then you go onto the next one, which is 9 *Ee*, and all the way through the number and the name of the day. And it's 13 numbers and 20 day names. And you count through these and you get through your stacks. And that's not all of 260 days. It's considerably less than 260 days. And then you go through again, and by the time you've done a round of four-goes-through, you haven't yet done 260 days. You've done maybe 80 days out of the calendar. And each of them has a set of meanings, and the meanings are created by punning on the day names. So, *Batz, kabatz'inik, botz'oj, tz'onoj*, it's sound play. And so the Monkey is connected to the monkey's ability to use their fingers almost like humans and it's connected to thread and it's connected to weaving; it's also connected to making tape recordings, to making films and things of that sorts. So, a Monkey day is all connected to filming, to weaving, and to monkey business. That's the kind of day that Monkey is. And then the next day, *B'elejeb E', 9 E', Re be*, the road. It's a day relating to the good road and the road of life; the road of health; the road of happiness; the road of all good things. Okay? So, that's the next day on the calendar. And you go through day after day after day, and figuring out what the luck is; what the good things are, but there's also warnings. There's also things that aren't good and that should be taken care of – things relating to hunger, relating to anger of relatives, relating to traps in the road, things of that sort, that the day names will tell you as well.

Q: The divination he just did, he referred to Hunahpu, quite often. Why is that?

Barbara Tedlock: Right. Okay. *Jun Ajpu* is one of the important calendar days and *Ajpu* has to do with the relatives, the dead relatives, the ancestors. Okay? And Hunahpu is also a character in the *Popol Vuh – Jun Ajpu*'s a very important day. When you get *Ajpu* days in the calendar, you know that there's a relationship between the person you're divining for and their relatives, some kind of relationship where it's either good or it's not so good, because if you don't remember your relatives, you don't pray for them; you don't divine for them; you don't think about them all the time; then they get jealous. They get angry, so you're supposed to always be connected to the dead to your dead ancestors. So, a *Jun Ajpu* day is a very important day for the ancestors.

Q: The importance of books, and having books, and putting things in books, and the altar is a book….

Barbara Tedlock: Okay. The altars, the burning places, the places where Copal incense is burned is where everybody speaks and puts their prayers and puts their words in, and

therefore, it's a book. And on a day like 8 Monkey, thousands of words are put into that place. I mean, it really fills up. It makes a whole library, and so people are praying there, and these places are books, and have the knowledge of what's going on in the world; what's good about the world; what we need to do to balance the world, to make things better with the world. And all the different shrines, in which you burn Copal incense, are books, because there are thousands of words in these shrines. You can actually, as you stand there, you can hear the words are just there from the murmuring of generations. So, it goes all the way back into your history and the history of all the people who've burned. And that's why you're presented to a particular altar, because there are people you have a right to speak to at that altar. You don't go to a different altar. You go to a particular altar, and there's a whole set of knowledge that goes on there.

Their own introduction to Momostenango and initiation as daykeepers

Q: Great. How did you guys come to Momostenango and how did you end up becoming daykeepers?

Dennis Tedlock: When we arrived in Momostenango, almost immediately we were drawn to the place called Paklom, which is the center of the world. It's a hill near the center of the town. We were drawn there, I suppose, by the sight of a column of copal smoke. And little by little we discovered there were other shrines connected to it, and that some days no one was there and other days there were lots of people in a given place. So, we pieced together that these places became activated as sacred places according to the calendar.

And we noticed that all these things were going on in a very public fashion. There's even a burning place right in front of the parish church, in the middle of the plaza. And what pleased us about that was that here were public acts of devotion, public spirituality, that was not going on according to the Christian calendar. There were no apologies for it. It wasn't hidden away; a lot of native North Americans have to hide some of the things they do and not let anyone see what they're doing. Here, if you don't interrupt people or annoy them, they're – as you can see when you attend a ceremony like 8 Monkey, people greet you, they're pleased that attention is being paid to those things, if you behave yourself, and are there in the spirit of the whole thing. And so we were drawn in just by that ease of observation and interacting with people. But, there were a few things that we weren't aware of, that we became aware of later about what we were doing.

Barbara Tedlock: We made some mistakes.

Dennis Tedlock: Yes.

Barbara Tedlock: Yeah. Making a mistake is a good way to learn, and we learned through our mistakes. We wandered around with our cameras taking pictures of people at these shrines. And nobody seemed to mind, so we didn't ask permission or anything. We just did it, because we were fascinated in doing it. But, there was a woman who was burning at one of the shrines, when I took a picture; I clicked and she turned around, and she looked at me with a look that I could see that I had made her very unhappy by taking that picture. That really startled me – really scared me. And then I realized, oh, I see. We've been doing this, just going around everywhere taking pictures of people, and some people don't like this. And that, I think was the beginning of recognizing, you know, that we were more than interested. We were fascinated and we wanted to be involved. And then what happened, very soon thereafter, is I became extremely ill with what we diagnosed as a very bad flu maybe becoming pneumonia.

And so I needed a divination. I needed somebody to help me with this flu. And then that's how we came to work with Andres. Right? That was – he came to our patio—

Dennis Tedlock: We had already found him because we were looking for someone—

Barbara Tedlock: – who knew things –

Dennis Tedlock: – a diviner and who could explain to us what was going on at the shrines.

Barbara Tedlock: Right.

Dennis Tedlock: When he divined for the illness that Barbara couldn't get rid of—

Barbara Tedlock: It was just awful. I could hardly breathe.

Dennis Tedlock: He divined without knowing it firsthand that we had been going around to the shrines—

Barbara Tedlock: — doing what we'd been doing.

Dennis Tedlock: — and most importantly, he suspected that we didn't know that you can't enter a shrine unless you've kept the day.

Barbara Tedlock: Right.

Dennis Tedlock: You can't enter the sacred precinct. And keeping the day means no sexual contact or no quarrels – no expression of anger on those days. Those are equal violations. If – suppose someone were suppose to go on a certain day to a certain shrine, but forgot all of that and made a pass at someone or got angry with someone, they would just have to drop the whole idea of going and do it some other time 'cause they would have broken the sacredness of the day. And he told us that something awful would happen to us.

Barbara Tedlock: He did a divination in which he came up with the day name, *Kame*, many times, also *Quej* – indicated that we would die; we would both die. And it was because of my indiscretion with taking that picture of the woman who didn't want to have her picture taken. And both of us running around, sort of like dogs, not knowing what we were doing; going to shrines; making mistakes. So, it was – we were terrified because the – he said we would die and that was it. And we didn't know what to do.

Dennis Tedlock: And one of the things that you need to ask your diviner when a diviner finds out there's something wrong in the picture, as you ask them, "What can be done about it?"

Barbara Tedlock: We didn't know to do that.

Dennis Tedlock: We didn't really – we didn't realize that we should've then said, "All right. What are we going to do about this?" So we actually fled this place—

Barbara Tedlock: And we got on the bus.

Dennis Tedlock: And went to Guatemala City to sort of recuperate and be away from all these things—

Barbara Tedlock: — cause I thought I really was gonna' die. And I really was feeling – and I hadn't gone to a pharmacy or anything and I was coughing constantly.

Dennis Tedlock: So, we came back after thinking it over and came to Andres and asked, "All right. What do we do?" And so then he proposed making offerings for us on certain days. We would have to carefully keep those days. No, we would not go with him to the shrine, but we would be fully aware that that was—

Barbara Tedlock: — being done for us.

Dennis Tedlock: He made us mark them all on a calendar. And then we began to study the process of divination—

Barbara Tedlock: Right.

Dennis Tedlock: <laughs> -with Andres and the turning point came – I mean we asked him what each of the days meant and why do you go to such-and-such a place on such-and-such a day? And went on and on with those kinds of questions – the kinds of questions an ethnographer would ask. Why do people do all these things?

Barbara Tedlock: Right.

Dennis Tedlock: And then we came to the crucial point of asking him to describe how people were trained and initiated, which is a perfectly good next kind of tack to take in questions. And he said, "Well, for example, if I were to train you, let me see," he thought about the calendar. "I would begin on such-and-such a day and I would begin presenting you in my prayers to the shrines. I would begin presenting you as proposed diviners and so on," and he went on and described some more of the process. So, he just dropped that one little sentence and so we debated all the next night—

Barbara Tedlock: We stayed up all night-.

Dennis Tedlock: Was he just doing another "for example" or was he saying—

Barbara Tedlock: — proposing he could train us?

Dennis Tedlock: — was he proposing that he would actually do this? So we came back to him—

Barbara Tedlock: — the next day.

Dennis Tedlock: — the next day. And said, "When you said such-and-such, did you mean that you would—"

Barbara Tedlock: **"**— really train us?"

Dennis Tedlock: And he laughed and said, "Of course."

Barbara Tedlock: Then we were caught, because then we said, "Fine. How do we do this?" And so – and at that point, the whole role, everything changed. We were no longer ethnographers asking questions. We were apprentices learning and trying to be as

intelligent as we could. And it's very hard to be an apprentice and to learn a system, very hard.

Dennis Tedlock: And one of the things he warned us of, early on, which we took lightly at first – there are things like this in other systems of apprenticeship and so on, but he said, "While you are learning this, don't let other people ask you questions about it." He said there are going to be people who find out you're doing this, and they're gonna' say, "Why are you doing that?" Or they're going to ask you a question about it and you'll answer it according to what you know, and then they'll cast doubt on it, or they'll say something like, "Do you really believe that?"

Barbara Tedlock: That seems stupid, to me.

Dennis Tedlock: He said this is going to happen to you. And you must learn to just brush all of that off.

Barbara Tedlock: And he was right. Indeed, immediately a couple of people who we knew in town, who found out what we were doing, just thought it was ridiculous and that, you know, they belittled the system; they belittled what we were doing, so we learned to not say anything about it.

Dennis Tedlock: This is a whole stigma for the anthropologist – the whole myth of going native –

Barbara Tedlock: Right.

Dennis Tedlock: **"**Oh, you guys are going native?" And that's an interesting and appropriate kind of thing in this case, too, because when you're taught what we learned, no one thinks you're becoming a Mayan. They think that you're learning some useful knowledge that Mayans happen to have, and you're smart enough – even though you're a gringo –

Barbara Tedlock: – to figure out –

Dennis Tedlock: – to realize that they have something worth learning. And they assume you're going to take this home with you and do something with it.

Barbara Tedlock: Right.

Dennis Tedlock: Not that you're going to become an expatriate and live the rest of your life in their town. So, that whole "going native" thing is kind of a myth when it comes to acquiring a specialized knowledge like this.

Barbara Tedlock: Because I was a graduate student doing ethnography, and being paid to do my research, I felt that I had the obligation to write a letter to my three advisors telling them what we were doing; that I was no longer working as an ethnographer asking a series of questions, but I was being trained, and what was involved in that. I thought it was the right thing to do, to inform them. And it was an interesting experience because one of my advisors really thought it was wonderful. He thought it was terrific, and that I should just work hard at doing it.

The other two did not like it at all, and one of them was absolutely furious that I would do it, and actually got on an airplane; came to Guatemala; came to our house in the center of the town to try to talk us out of it. And it was humiliating to have this experience. And he said that I was unworthy to be a graduate student and all kinds of remarkable things, which I later figured out all related to his personal history. He had gone to UCLA; he knew Carlos Castaneda; he was a Mormon and he just thought that either we were ludicrous and ridiculous or fraudulent or you know, just all kinds of really bad things. So, we had to withstand that, as well. And we had been warned by Andres that there would be people who would attack us. And I realized this advisor of mine was attacking me, and so I told him, "Thanks a lot, but it's time for you to go back home to New York. And we're doing this." Yeah. It was a remarkable experience.

Dennis Tedlock: And he used the word, and some other people did, too, used the Spanish word, *brujos* introduced us to some of his visitors as *brujos* – they're learning to be *brujos*.

Barbara Tedlock: Right.

Dennis Tedlock: And of course that's a Christian term of denigration –

Barbara Tedlock: Right. It was embarrassing.

Dennis Tedlock: – of the religious practices of others, clear back to the Middle Ages and so on, we know that story quite well, but out popped that word. The Spanish equivalent of witch.

Barbara Tedlock: Yeah, and the way he made peace with what I was doing was, "Oh, I see. This is a strategy. She's just doing this in order to get better information than other ethnographers do." And that was wrong, too; this was not a strategy. This is not the way it came about, but he couldn't put it together that we would actually do this; take it seriously; and then it would become part of our lives, which it still is today.

Their experience of the Austin Hieroglyphic Workshops and of working with Linda Schele

Q: Okay. I want to ask you guys about your experience in working with and relating to epigraphers – as ethnographers relating to epigraphers. It may be your first experience was the early Linda Schele workshops?

Barbara Tedlock: Yeah.

Q: Or even earlier than that? But also what your experience was of those workshops, especially in the early days, and what your experience was with Linda.

Barbara Tedlock: When was our first workshop?

Dennis Tedlock: Oh, in the 80s, sometime –

Barbara Tedlock: Early 80s –

Dennis Tedlock: We went to about three of them.

Barbara Tedlock: Yeah.

Dennis Tedlock: Scattered over about five years.

Barbara Tedlock: Right.

Dennis Tedlock: Or six – no, longer than that.

Barbara Tedlock: No, longer than that. I think we went to more than three, but anyway –

Dennis Tedlock: Maybe four –

Barbara Tedlock: That's where we met, you know, a lot of epigraphers. Nikolai Grube – we met just tons of them. David Stuart was there.

Dennis Tedlock: Peter Matthews, Floyd Lounsbury-

Q: What were those chaps like? What was the feeling there?

Barbara Tedlock: Oh, it was crazy. <Laughs> Yeah.

Dennis Tedlock: Linda had the power to – I mean, if you think about it in a certain way, it's extraordinarily tedious stuff, but, especially if she was on her favorite site which was Palenque, and taking people through this notebook – she had a way of – in fact, yes, the only other person that I know who could hold an audience for an entire day and they wouldn't budge was Buckminster Fuller –

Barbara Tedlock: Buckminster Fuller and Linda Schele.

Dennis Tedlock: She could go on and on –

Barbara Tedlock: – and on –

Dennis Tedlock: – keeping herself going with a half gallon of Coca Cola.

Barbara Tedlock: Right.

Dennis Tedlock: And everyone was just scrambling to figure out what she was talking about in the notebook. And of course, some more experienced people were there to get little, new tidbits from the mouths of people, coming from the audience or Linda herself. So, it – you know –

Barbara Tedlock: It's like a fiesta, I mean, it was wonderful. It's jubilant and it was discovery. Everything was discovery and everyone was equal. Anybody could make a discovery, or could help with decipherment.

Q: Say that again.

Barbara Tedlock: Yeah, okay. It was discovery; it was wonderful discovery. And anyone could participate. It could be a brand new novice who might be able to make a decipherment. Everybody was treated equally. There weren't like, 'the experts' – I mean, there were faculty people who knew more than other people, who we all respected, but there was a notion that we could all do something together. And, you know, it was in

an art department, so we were in a place that was different than most academics experience. And we had Xeroxes and we had tape and we had scissors and we would cut things out and run up and put them on the board, and it was physical. It wasn't just Linda talking at us, although Linda had the ability to talk for hours at you and to do overhead slides and to actually use different color pens on them so, this is an element; this an affix, this is a this, this is a that. You know, on and on and on and on. And so that there you are with your notebook and you're trying to self-color the different things. So it was much more – I had been a student at the Art Students League in New York, so I know how art school works, and it was much more like an art school experience, don't you think?

Dennis Tedlock: Yes.

Barbara Tedlock: Yeah, you'd been in art, too – than it was an academic experience.

Dennis Tedlock: Right. And she wanted everyone to have different colored marking pens so they could sort out different kinds of information when they marked up their books. And then in the advanced workshops, people really got into scissors and paste and reorganizing stuff and putting it up on boards and discussing and debating it and so forth. And one thing that I did when I did one of the advanced workshops was to ask the question, "Well, how would this sound if anybody read it aloud?" I mean there must've been ceremonies where inscriptions, let's say were dedicated, and there were performers that said, orators who said something to an audience that had some connection or overlap with what was in the inscription being dedicated. So, my group organized a – with I think four different voices, a presentation of the cross group texts, in translation. And we introduced it with a drum because we had the idea that the initial series glyph had to do with drumming and announcing, so we worked all of that out as our presentation at the end of the workshop. One of the details that still sticks in my mind, is that Nancy Troike, whose field is really Oaxaca – those other books, those comic books, as the epigraphers call them! – she used to always introduce the workshops –

Barbara Tedlock: Yes.

Dennis Tedlock: So, everyone is sitting at the evening –

Barbara Tedlock: – first lecture –

Dennis Tedlock: – first lecture of the evening before the intensive work begins and she would come down the aisle with a boom box playing the theme music from Star Wars.

Barbara Tedlock: Yes. That would get us all in the mood. That would be the first thing we would do as a group, would be this – Star Wars, you know, and it was exciting. And the introductory lecture was always two hours long and it set the tone for the whole meeting. It was usually Linda who did it, but then in later years she had other people do the introductory lecture for her.

Dennis Tedlock: Michael [Coe] did it.

Barbara Tedlock: Yeah, Michael did it.

Dennis Tedlock: Peter Matthews did it. And then she – part of what worked for her is that she knew how to defend and guard and keep her authority. She welcomed comments from the audience, but she would never concede a point on the spot.

Barbara Tedlock: Right.

Dennis Tedlock: Someone would make a very good suggestion, she might later even say they were right. But, she would never admit that they were right in front of that big audience. She would just say, "Well, that's interesting," and move on.

Q: What is your take on her contribution to the field – positive, negative? She was a complicated person and affected different people in different ways.

Barbara Tedlock: Yeah. Linda got a lot wrong and how can you get a lot right, though, unless you get a lot wrong? You know? And in time, you know, it'll become clearer and it is becoming clearer which parts will stand and which parts won't, but that's the way knowledge grows. But she didn't have any fear of getting things wrong. And she had no fear like – she really didn't understand astronomy very well, at all, and so she just went into that field, self-trained and made a lot of mistakes in the astronomy. A lot of that's not gonna' hold, the astronomy part that she did in the cosmology [in *Maya Cosmos*]. But, I mean, here she was an artist, untrained, so you know, I value the fact that she tried. She just went out there. Right?

Dennis Tedlock: There's an interesting irony in that, too because of course, Mary Miller and she did that *Blood of Kings* exhibit, which sort of was – "Here's what we what have to say that contradicts Thompson – the Maya weren't so peaceful and all that." So on comes the blood sacrifice and the taking of captives in the warfare and all the rest of it. But it's funny then after enough years went by, she circles, Linda does, circles back around to the astronomy, which was one of Thompson's fortes, and of course, took

another pass at it. A lot had already been said about the astronomy and the hieroglyphic books, for example, but she – with the help certainly of Floyd Lounsbury – dug deeper into the astronomy – and she did –

Barbara Tedlock: She got some good things.

Dennis Tedlock: – had some really good insights, as when she realized that the three hearthstones – the three stones she was seeing in the inscriptions were the same as –

Barbara Tedlock: -as the Quiché Maya ones that are used today. And that was one of her eureka moments when she said, "Oh, my god. It's the same thing." You know? But, she was able to put that together, to see it in the inscriptions, and then I've since seen these beautiful three hearthstones in a lot of different inscriptions that I would never have seen before Linda.

Dennis Tedlock: Also, I guess that brings up another thing that we always liked about her. Unlike a lot of other epigraphers and archeologists, she didn't have a pious studied ignorance of Highlands things. She got her insights, she got her sometimes luscious ideas wherever she could find them. She didn't avoid knowing anything about Highland languages or Highland customs.

Barbara Tedlock: No.

Dennis Tedlock: Quite the contrary.

Barbara Tedlock: She was not a snob about anything and that I think was her great strength. And to be an omnivore, and to be interested in everything – and throwing her entire life at this. I mean, I believe she started in '72, was her big moment, and she was in Palenque, and suddenly it changed her life. And she went from being an art teacher into being a self-trained epigrapher. She learned archeology – I mean the fields of study she learned was just remarkable, and it became her entire life. You know? And that kind of energy – and she was very giving and trained others because she felt that the more she gave away, the more would come back. I mean she gave us our first astronomy program. Remember that?

Dennis Tedlock: That's right.

Barbara Tedlock: Yeah. She would give away things.

Dennis Tedlock: We pushed her work in astronomy further because she saw what we were doing and said, "Here –"

Barbara Tedlock: Yeah, "Take this."

Dennis Tedlock: She gave us a copy of a very good program that you could punch in a date and see what the sky was like on that date. And in fact, at a later date, she gave us a second program that was even better –

Barbara Tedlock: – that was better. Yeah. She did this with people. In other words, she figured out people who might contribute to the field and gave away things to them. And just said, "Here. Welcome. Come into this field." And I don't think we would be where we are in Mayan studies now, if Linda hadn't gotten interested and excited. I really think she's a centerpiece to where we've gotten today. But, we will get a lot further as time goes on.

Q: There's that other side where she was so omnivorous and pushed so far that she often used things without totally acknowledging –

Barbara Tedlock: That's a tendency in scholarship. You cannibalize other people's work and you can't help it. And anyone who is famous, anybody who becomes a spokesperson for a field, gets a lot of resentment and Linda indeed, did get a lot of resentment for that. But I think she did so much for the field, that whatever small infractions should be forgotten.

Q: Okay. Thank you.

Barbara Tedlock: Is that it?

Q: During the Guatemalan war, at the beginning of the linguistic workshops and the beginning of the knowledge of the epigraphy going back to the Maya, what was your personal experience of that?

Dennis Tedlock: Well, we weren't directly involved in showing the epigraphic findings to contemporary Mayas. We knew that Linda was doing that, and certainly approved of it. And here's another thing about her, she wasn't saying, "These aren't the right Maya, you know," people who were speaking Mayan languages were going to her workshops in Antigua, and others would say, "Well, but it's not their writing system. It belongs to those other Maya."

Barbara Tedlock: Right.

Dennis Tedlock: My answer to that is so far as I know the English didn't invent the alphabet. So what are we doing using these Latin letters? As far as that goes, what were Romans doing their version of Greek letters? And as far as that goes, what were Greeks doing using Phoenician letters? So, to say that the wrong Mayas are learning the hieroglyphs is just crazy.

Barbara Tedlock: We encouraged her when we heard that she was doing it – and so did Duncan Earle. We're among the people to whom she timidly said, "I'm doing this, but people are going to criticize me 'cause it's the wrong Mayan languages and so forth," and we said to her, "No, no, no." And then began to make the arguments – I explained to her about the 1722 calendar and that that was a Highland Mayan language. It was Quiché. It's clear that there were codices in Highland Mayan languages and Dennis gave her all those arguments, too. But when she was first starting, she'd heard the arguments against what she was doing and we just said, "No, what you're doing is right." And that we need to learn from all the Mayan languages. Okay? So, yes, we were among the first people to really encourage her and to say, "Go forward and do it." But we didn't do it ourselves, in other words, we're not epigraphers. Dennis and I do many things, but we're not epigraphers. We're trained as linguists. We're trained as ethnographers and we're fascinated in epigraphy. And actually, you've made a couple of contributions. You've published a couple of epigraphic decipherments.

Dennis Tedlock: But in a context – ironically the – one of my contributions to epigraphy has kind of been glossed over by – one of the things that happened to Linda's work after her death, or even before her death was that certain epigraphers began deciding that perhaps one of the key characters in the cross group inscriptions was not a goddess at all, but a god. And when you read the inscriptions clear through and pay attention to everything that's said there, there's no way you can make that argument. The goddess is mentioned near the beginning of that is clearly the mother of the Palenque triad. You can't – there's no way-

Barbara Tedlock: -there's no other reading-

Dennis Tedlock: -to change her sex without messing up some of the rest of what those texts say.

Barbara Tedlock: Right. Well, also about the scribes, as we said, you know, the scribes are both male and female, and these same epigraphers were suddenly pointing to

scribes that had bare boobs. Right? And the pens in their hair and saying they were men. And we thought, now you've really gone over the deep end. Men with really beautiful, voluptuous boobs that are bare? No, I don't think so.

Dennis Tedlock: And that was based on a linguistic thing. In Yucatec, the *aj* prefix seems to be pretty masculinized, but in other Mayan languages –

Barbara Tedlock: It's not.

Dennis Tedlock: – it just refers to the mastery of something. And if you read the Motul dictionary very carefully, you find the *aj* prefix on many occupations that were women's occupations. Well, the epigraphers maybe less than about three years ago, finally admitted just because somebody was called *aj* that it wasn't necessarily - – in the case of a scribe *aj tzib* - – that that didn't necessarily mean that that person was male.

Barbara Tedlock: Any more than an *aj k'ij*, a daykeeper, is necessarily a male.

Dennis Tedlock: I don't know what took them so long. Except the problem with gender pronouns that we all have.

Q: Thank you. One other question for Dennis. *2000 years of Maya Literature* [the forthcoming book by Tedlock of poetic translations from hieroglyphic texts] and the distinction between transliteration and-

Barbara Tedlock: -translation.

Q: -the kind of work that an epigrapher kind of has to do, and "translation" which may get you into trouble with the epigraphers. Talk about that a little bit.

Barbara Tedlock: That's okay.

Q: Where that's headed.

Dennis Tedlock: Well, epigraphers have a tendency to go sign-by-sign and then they've modified that to a degree by learning how to decode Mayan syntax, so they know some linguistics. So, you get up to the level of the sentence, but there still really hasn't been that much work that could be hermeneutical. They're risen to the level of a sentence, but there's been very little real hermeneutics of long texts, that's puts everything together – that gets the tone of what's being said; that gets the argument, the plot, and indeed the poetry. At the fine, poetic level there's the question of: Well, in this passage, why did

the scribe – and they always use that word! How about *writers*? Some of these people who've made those inscriptions must've been what we would call *writers*, in the sense of practicing an art of producing texts that are interesting for what they say and not only for the way they look. Looking at Mayan texts, you have to kind of want to have it both ways.

But, here's where you would get literary about, why, in talking about something that Pakal did, did they choose these particular signs among others to express that? And whether they had choices as to what logograms and what syllabograms to use. Is there a kind of visual poetry there? And another level – what's going on at the level of the *sound* of the poetry? And then it at a still broader level, this business of the plot, the argument of the text – what is this text – oh, a lot of them are very repetitive. All right. That's fine. That's a rhetorical device. Then what point is the writer of this text trying to hammer home by saying this in this way, and in this order?

One of the things I noticed in the Palenque texts is that they go backwards and forwards in time. And when Mayans tell narratives today in the quite different language of the Quiché, they often don't tell stories in exact chronological order. They have flash-forwards and flashbacks. It fits with their whole complicated sense of the overlapping rhythms of time. But if, let's say, going back to the dynastic inscriptions of a place like Palenque, if your goal is just to extract dynastic history, then what do you do? You take all of that stuff and you put it in chronological order in a table and you say, "All right." Then you put all the data from the inscriptions together. This king ruled from this date to this date and married so-and-so; was installed as king at such-and-such a time. And the next person was appointed the heir apparent at such and such a date and so on and so on. And ta-dum – here we have the history of kingship at Palenque. And in the process, the poetry disappears, and the subtleties of plot disappear, and the Mayan twists of time disappear in favor of this monological, chronological order. I find those king lists quite dull. The inscriptions themselves are much more interesting, because they don't just rack things out in a simple chronological order like that. So, they need to be studied for the way they're put together, and *why* they were put together that way.

Barbara Tedlock: Well, and that's why you're doing the book you're doing. <Laughs>

Dennis Tedlock: So, one of the things that we unify in my book on 2000 years of Mayan literature, which will unite the hieroglyphic texts to the alphabetical ones and come right down to contemporary oral and tradition, will be just that point of this – these convolutions of time, the interruptions of chronological order in contemporary Mayan

folk tales, all the way back to classic inscriptions. In the *Popol Vuh*, the same thing happens – the *Popol Vuh* starts with the beginning of the world, then goes into the middle of the story of the heroes and then flashes back to the story of their fathers, and then goes back to the story of the sons and their mother, and so forth.

Barbara Tedlock: Well, it's a weaving aesthetic.

Dennis Tedlock: Or – why did they always put in the divinatory dates? 'Cause that's just a 260-day *cycle* and all that kind of thing, you see this word *cyclical* over and over again. Cyclical time is a kind of Western term invented to describe the time of the other. We in the West have linear time. We have history and other dusky peoples like the Maya think that everything goes in a circle. Well, the Mayas didn't like circles at all. All those katun wheels are after the conquest, and they're not even wheels. They're not meant to spin. They may be circles, but they're not wheels. The analogies are more in polyrhythmic music and the polyrhythms of complicated weaving, like you have to read a weaving to see, oh, I see, this pattern is repeating itself, but with new variations. That's kind of a Maya way of doing things. And it's not that the weaving went in a circle. It's going on just the way a piece of music goes on. So, there are a lot of things that need to be reorganized in thinking about the Maya. An awful lot of that can be done right out of careful reading and translation of what Mayans wrote, and not reducing it to data to be reorganized in a chronological machine or something like that.

The significance of the completion of the Baktun cycle in 2012.

Q: What is the significance of 2012?

Barbara Tedlock: 2012 is an important date in the Maya long count. It's a date that is like any other long count date. It's just the end of one era; the beginning of another. It is not the end of the world. There'll be no apocalypse in 2012. And there's very good evidence that we will continue beyond 2012. Right? Well, you can talk about that list of 13 numbers and stuff.

Dennis Tedlock: It's December 21st, isn't it?

Barbara Tedlock: Yeah. December 21st, 2012 is the so-called –

Dennis Tedlock: So, it is interesting that to speculate that engaging this 13.0.0.0.0 cycle – that the Mayas might have even meant to aim for the winter solstice, to coincide with

that particular transition. But if the highest Maya calendar priests were around today, they'd probably be having debates as to how big a cycle is that really. Because there are inscriptions that have, what? 13 followed by – is it 13 zeroes?

Barbara Tedlock: 13 zeroes.

Dennis Tedlock: so, at least – at some Maya sites, they were speculating with much bigger numbers. In a way, you could argue that 13.0.0.0.0 is just shorthand for something we don't really know how long it is.

Barbara Tedlock: Right.

Dennis Tedlock: I have no doubt that Maya kings would've been erecting monuments announcing that their reign had crossed this great threshold. They would see it as a milestone and they would put up a monument proudly to mark that they had reigned at this particular moment in time.

Barbara Tedlock: I don't understand where these apocalyptic things come from, except Christianity. You know? Christianity is really into apocalypse… It's such a mystery to me how this thing got created and perpetuated.

Dennis Tedlock: It's interesting, too, that when you look at Mayan texts, especially Highland Mayan texts that deal with the coming of Europeans – They do not confer the dignity of prophesy on the arrival of the Spaniards. It's really, if you looked at all the texts that have ever been written about the conquest of Mexico, say, you would see that it's really the Europeans who are obsessed with the idea-

Barbara Tedlock: -of their arrival-

Dennis Tedlock: -that their arrival had been prophesized – that there had been omens, comets and all that kind of stuff. All that stuff appears in Aztec literature after the conquest. When Europeans cite that kind of thing, it's their way of trying to legitimize – and the model that's behind it, a lot of us aren't so familiar with, anymore, in Christian <tape ends abruptly>