

ANDRES XILOJ

Interviewed February 12 2005 in his weaving workshop in Momostenango, Guatemala



Andres Xiloj is a Ki'che' Maya daykeeper, or keeper of the calendar, in the highland town of Momostenango.

In this interview he discusses the significance of the day *Wajxaqib' B'atz'* or 8 Monkey, on which daykeepers from all over Guatemala gather in Momostenango to renew their vows. He also describes the significance of each of the Maya days, used in the practice of divination. This practice is discussed in more detail in the interview with Barbara and Dennis Tedlock.

Interview Transcript

(Translation from Ki'che' and notes by Allen J. Christenson)

Q: What will happen on the day *Wajxaqib' B'atz'*?

XILOJ: What will happen tomorrow on *Wajxaqib' B'atz'* [*8 B'atz'*], is that we will place our offering of *pom* [copal incense]; we will offer our candle to our Lord God, to our Lord *8 B'atz'*, to our mother, to our father [mother/father is the ceremonial couplet for "ancestors"]. We say that we carry a portion for the mother, the father. This we will say tomorrow.

And also, then, we will place the very white candle, the very white road, the very white work/destiny [*be*—"road", and *jok*—"work" (particularly work in the fields or work done as a community) together form the ceremonial couplet that means "destiny"]. The *pom* incense that we will place on the altar/shrine [*jujub'al*—"mountain" and *taq'aj*—"plain" together refer to the earth itself, but also form a ceremonial metaphor for a shrine or altar], a petition for peace [*utzil* is goodness, peace, blessing], a petition for a miracle/wonder for our lives, for our road, our work [again, road/work couplet reading "destiny"]; for the benefit of our children, for our neighbors; for the benefit of our community, for our harvest of maize. This is what they say of what we will do on the day *8 B'atz'*.

And also, then, for the [following] day *B'elejeb' E'* [9 E'], as it is called; this is for asking for a very good road, a very good work [together meaning destiny], and also upon the heads of all those of my road and of my work [my destiny]; and for that of my children, and for my neighbors, and for us. This is what is done, as we say.

And also the white candle proclaims that we have a good road, a good work [destiny]; for our lives, our wealth, our business, our land. This is what the white candle means. Now, the black candle means that which is within darkness, within the night. And the green means the greenness of the mountains, and of the harvests, and all that grows upon the earth. This is what green means. The blue represents the sky, that which is in the sky. This is what the color blue says. That is all. Thank you.

Q. What are the responsibilities of the *ajq'ijab'* [daykeepers]? What are the things that are done on the day 8 *B'atz'*?

XILOJ: Their work.... What they will carry out in their service..... They carry out the service of the bundle, to unwrap the bundle, to untie it, to cure our mothers, our fathers when they are ill.

And on this day, 7 *Tz'i'*, on this day also are offered the pom incense and flowers; This is what is offered on this day, 7 *Tz'i'*. On the day 8 *B'atz'*, they also carry out their service at the small altar shrine, at the water, and upon the great altar shrine. This is the work of an *ajq'ij*, of a *chuchqajaw* [literally mother-father, this is a higher rank of *ajq'ij* who represents the head of a lineage traditionally, though now it's more of an honorific for a powerful *ajq'ij*].

Q. And how do you know the calendar?

XILOJ: From my ancestors, and my father who passed away.

Q. Could you say the names of the days, and what they mean?

XILOJ: For example, today is the day *Wuqub' Tz'i'* (7 *Tz'i'*). On this day one must not shame one's self, nor in what you say while in the work and service of *Dios Mundo* [Earth God, traditional name for the lord of the earth].

Tomorrow, *B'atz'* is for winding up your life, your existence; for winding up as well the life of future posterity/descendents [one of the mnemonics for *B'atz'* is thread. He's

making a play on words for winding up thread as a metaphor for giving order and structure to life].

E', B'elejeb' E' [9 E']. On this day, one asks for a good road, a good work [destiny] for all people, and for me, and for my children.

Aj. *Aj* refers to the canes/stalks that are doubled/bent over [he's referring to the bending over of maize stalks near the time of harvest as a metaphor for what follows]. It is the same with us. We kneel before *Mundo*, and before God, and before our ancestors.

Ix. *K'ix*.... *K'ixib'al*.... Shame.... *K'ixik*....

Tz'ikin. Day of poverty, Day of money, of cost.

Ajmak. Day of the sinner. Quick to do his sin.

No'j. Wisdom. Wise person. Knowledge. One who knows.

Tijax. Speaking, Talking, Our speech.

Kawoq [usually pronounced *Kawuq* but he's pronouncing it this way to fit his mnemonic]. You bring together your mouth, your face, to ask for peace/goodness, miracles/wonders, a favor. It is not to call for evil upon your neighbor.

Ajpu. If there is someone who is pushing or stabbing [metaphors for curses put on someone by a traditionalist priest], who torments, this day is for guarding against this. You are to do peace/goodness and marvels/wonders at the hands of *Ajpu*.

Imox. May you not go insane in your work, nor act stupidly in your work, in your service. If someone is crazed behind your hands, your feet, leave them behind. *Imox*.

Ik' is the wind. It is what moves us, what gives us our speech, what moves us.

Aq'ab'al. This is the dawn, the early hours. It is joyful to awaken early when the face of the earth becomes clear. Morning, early in the morning. Do not allow the early morning sun to gain victory over you and your work, or the sun will have pissed on you [an expression that means the sun will have defeated you if you get up late].

K'at is the net with which one gathers together ears of maize. When one goes to the Maya altars, it is not carried in nets, nor is it carried in baskets, nor in bags. Only this little bit, only this handful—just my candle, my incense do I bring to this altar [the expression is *jujub'al taq'aj* “mountain plain” a metaphor for both a traditional Maya altar as well as a poetic expression for the face of the earth. Obviously he is lapsing here into a formulaic prayer that is used when offering candles and incense at an altar rather than just explaining what is done] on the day *K'at*.

Kan. Kanoq [left behind]. May peace/goodness come.

Kame. This is not for death. Neither is it for disappearance. It is for that which is good; for my life, for your life.

Quej. Refers to the four cardinal directions of the world. It is a deer that sustains the world. He has four hooves. He has strength/power. *Quej* [deer]. If there is someone who tramples upon me or pushes me [curses me with black arts], this nawal [enchanted, powerful] deer is the one that will help me.

Q'anil. It is what brings the food, the atole [used generically here as a reference to life sustaining drink as opposed to solid food].

Toj. May there not come pain, debt; may they not come behind my hands, my feet; nor the hands and feet of my children. May they not come behind the hands nor the feet of my neighbor [again lapsing into poetic or ritual speech used in prayers].

Tz'i'. Ah, but I already told you about *Tz'i'*.