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SCIENCE IN ANCIENT ARTWORK

Macuilli Ollin Tonatiuh

The Fifth Sun on the Aztec Calendar

Charles William Johnson

Within the legend of the Aztec peoples there exists the idea of Four Worlds. It is said that four worlds had risen and been destroyed earlier, and that at the time of the Spanish Conquest, the world had just entered into the Fifth Sun. The concept of “Sun” appears to have been an expression for a cosmic age. As given with many aspects of oral history, the interpretations about the Four Worlds, or the Four Suns, vary according to who is doing the telling, or who is doing the listening.

One of the most outstanding examples of the legend of the Four Worlds can be found inscribed on the Aztec Calendar or Sunstone, known in Spanish, as *La piedra del sol*. The interpretation of the Aztec Sunstone, however, is open to discussion, as a break existed between the peoples who created that sculpture, and their descendants. Especially after the conquest of the Americas by Spain during most of the sixteenth century and later into the nineteenth century, the social knowledge of the peoples of the Americas was lost in many respects. To what degree the ancient knowledge had been lost even before the Spanish conquest can only be surmised, as even less documentation exists in this regard. However, by some accounts, pyramidal sites like Teotihuacan and Palenque had been long abandoned before the coming of the Spaniards to the Americas.

The Aztec Calendar: *La piedra del sol*



It is safe to say, then, that the break in ancient knowledge with regard to the descendants of those knowledgeable peoples has probably undergone different facets and degrees of destruction. Such a situation leaves even the descendants of the peoples of the Americas today with doubts as to the exact meanings of much of the ancient artwork.

The Aztec Calendar stone is one of the most vital sculptures in discerning meaning from the past. It represents a kind of Rosetta stone for math and geometry, for the sciences of the ancients. The difference, however, between the Rosetta Stone and the Aztec Calendar is obvious; the former is of a linguistic nature, the latter of pure symbols whose sound, symbol and meaning are much more difficult to uncover. No “instruction booklet” has been found to explain the manner in which the Aztec Calendar may have functioned as a calendar or as some other knowledgeable devise.

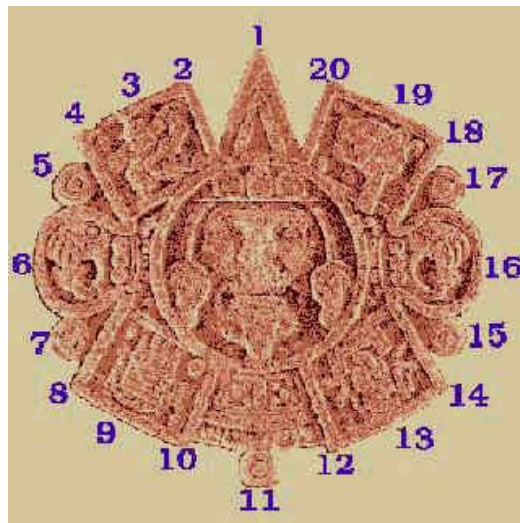
Many attempts have been made to discern an absolute meaning of the Aztec Calendar. To my mind, most of those attempts have failed, except for the ones that seek to relate the symbolic visual elements of the calendar’s apparent design with similar symbols and meanings recorded in the Codices of Mesoamerican cultures, and in other sculptures or artwork. Based upon the idea that mathematical and geometrical postulates underlie the design of the Aztec Calendar, I have been

attempting to relate some of those design elements to numbers registered in the ancient reckoning systems. In one particular analytical exercise, I have shown what occurs when a number is assigned to each outer coordinate of the pointer of the Aztec Calendar. With that procedure of numerical assignment, it is possible to mentally abstract and compute the different day-counts between the pointer and the day-glyph ring within which the pointer is located.

The Pointer of the Aztec Calendar

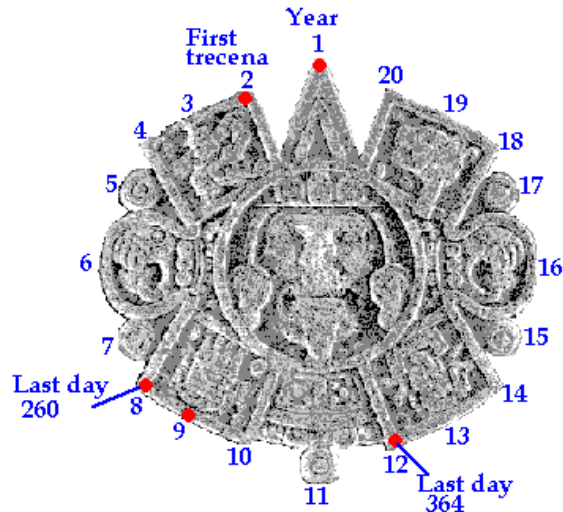


The Coordinate Points Assigned to the Pointer



In other studies of the possible functioning of the Aztec Calendar, with regard to the concentric rings that make up its design, I have also considered ancient reckoning numbers in relation to the short count and the long count of the Maya. The calendar systems of the Aztecs and the Maya, although not precisely identical, share enough common elements in my mind, as to merit such a comparison. In fact, the elements are even similar to calendars of other cultures in far away places such as in ancient Egypt. All of this, I have explained in different essays on my web-site: www.earthmatrix.com. It is not advisable to repeat those analyses here, for my purpose now is to discuss the possible meaning of the Aztec Calendar in the light of legendary myths, known and cited today.

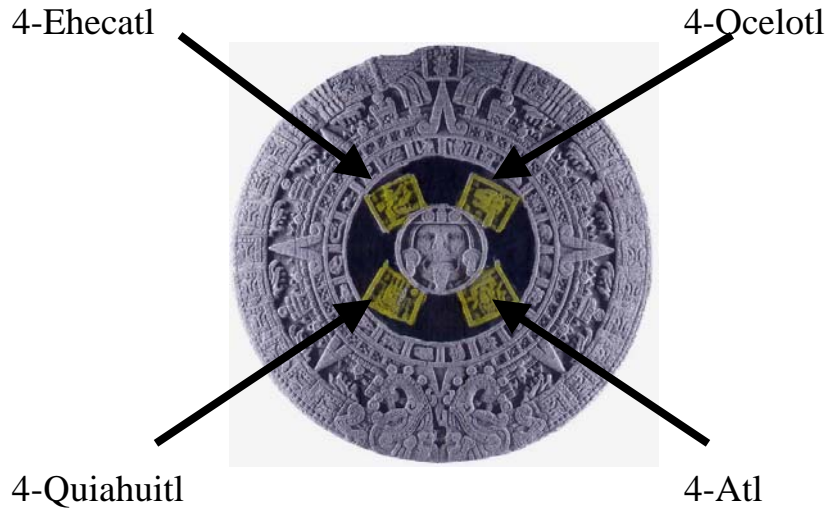
Days Indicated by the Pointer



Regarding the concept of the Four Worlds legend, different periods of time have been assigned to this legend. There are those who cite the Aztec period of Four Worlds as having lasted 2028 years, based on sub-periods of 676, 312, 364 and 676 years. Others cite a Maya Long-Count period for the Fifth World of 5125 years or, 5200 years, pertaining to the long-count period itself of 1872000 days. This later period has been identified as ending on different dates; from as recently as 1999, and as far into the future as 2011 or 2012. In any case, it is generally agreed that by the time the Spaniards had arrived, the peoples of Mesoamerica were living in the Fifth World, as the Four Worlds had already come to an end.

This may be readily accepted as it is conceptualized in fact in the design of the Four Worlds on the Aztec Calendar itself.

The Four Worlds in the Pointer of the Aztec Calendar



Different interpretations also exist regarding the nature and sequence of the Four Worlds, or Four Suns. For example, some interpretations place 4-Ocelotl as the first world. A common interpretation, however, is to identify the Four Suns as follows

Nahui Atl	4-Water	Water Sun	First Sun [<i>Tonatiuh</i>]
Nahui Ocelotl	4-Jaguar	Jaguar Sun	Second Sun [<i>Tonatiuh</i>]
Nahui Quiahuitl	4-Rain	Rain Sun	Third Sun [<i>Tonatiuh</i>]
Nahui Ehecatl	4-Wind	Wind Sun	Fourth Sun [<i>Tonatiuh</i>]
Nahui Ollin	4-Movement	Earthquake Sun	Fifth Sun [<i>Tonatiuh</i>]



As I gaze upon the face of the Aztec Calendar, I find the need to encounter the concept of the Fifth Sun. In my mind, I would expect to find 1-Tonatiuh, 2-Tonatiuh, 3-Tonatiuh, 4-Tonatiuh and 5-Tonatiuh. Such an idea seems reasonable to me, especially given the precise and exact order in which the ancients worked their numbers and cycles. If, as some scholars conclude, the central face etched on the Aztec Calendar is that of the Sun, Tonatiuh, then a reading as Nahui Atl Tonatiuh, Nahui Ocelotl Tonatiuh, Nahui Quiahuitl Tonatiuh, and, Nahui Ehecatl Tonatiuh, i.e., a reading of the Four Suns appears to be reasonable and symbolically acceptable. As each one of the Four World configurations revolve around, separately and sequentially to the face of the Sun, Tonatiuh. [Some scholars, such as Rubén Bonifaz Nuño, consider that the central figure of the Aztec Calendar is that of the Earth. In my mind, both interpretations, as the Sun and as the Earth (and even other additional interpretations) are possible. However, this theme would require another essay.]

The significant point, in my mind, at this time is to perceive the symbolic visualization of the concept of the Fifth Sun. The Nahui Ollin, 4-Movement,

encompasses the idea of the Four Worlds, but also established the beginning of the Fifth World. Yet, no one appears to draw attention to the Fifth World on the Aztec Calendar, other than to state that the calendar itself, the entire stone represents the Fifth World. That to me is somewhat vague, and I have the impression that the ancients left no stone unturned; they were exact, not vague.

The Nahui Ollin on the Aztec Calendar and the Ollin Day-glyph

The seventeenth day: the Ollin Day-glyph



Nahui Ollin highlighted in yellow.



Detail view of the Ollin Day-glyph

One may rightly ask, where is the Fifth Sun, the Macuilli Tonatiuh; this appears to me to be a demanding question. When one reads a glyph on the Aztec Calendar, such as the 13-Acatl in the upper edge of the stone, it is always read as thirteen-Acatl; the number of dots representing the number 13 itself are never divided up. The quantity of dots that accompany a particular glyph is read as that specific number. Yet, as illustrated above, the number four in Nahui Ollin selects four of the five large dots (or gigantic Chalchihuitls) within the pointer to identify the concept 4-movement.

Within the elements of the pointer, then, the 4:5 orbital relationship of Earth:Venus is thereby explicit. This relation would be computed as of the four world glyphs and the five large chalchihuitls. The 5:6 ratio would be the four world glyphs *plus* the two clenched claws in relation to the five large chalchihuitls.

The 4:5 Orbital Relationship of Venus: Earth



Further, from the numbered elements in the design of the pointer, one may also discern the 5:8 ratio. Consider the five large chalchihuitls in relation to the remaining eight elements: four world glyphs, two clenched fists/claws, one pointer (solar ray) and one tail feather element (representing an abbreviated arrow).

In my mind, there is a distinction being made that follows the ancient mythology as cited by so many different sources for the Legend of the Four Worlds and the Fifth World that follows. The pointer of the Aztec Calendar obviously contains the concept of Nahuui Ollin (four movement). The Aztec Sunstone is likewise portraying the Fifth World, or Macuilli-Tonatiuh also understood 5-Movement, Macuilli Ollin. In fact, this may be its predominant meaning. The five large chalchihuitls in relation to the pointer, an enlarged version of the seventeenth day-glyph sign, represent just such an interpretation: Macuilli Ollin. This would be represented by the entire symbolization within the pointer, excluding the four cardinal coordinate points (North-West-South-East).

Macuilli Chalchihuitls



The Nahuatl-Ollin is portrayed specifically in the 4-Ollin sign surrounding Tonatiuh. The Macuilli Ollin Tonatiuh symbol is reflected as of the seventeenth day-glyph on the day-glyph ring of the calendar. The case may be that the Nahuatl Ollin [4-movement] is read without the point, or solar ray, while the Macuilli Ollin [5-movement] is read with the pointer. There are far too many examples in the Codices and other sculptures that reflect this distinctive contrast in the Ollin sign; some with a pointer and some without a pointer.

The Macuilli Ollin Tonatiuh and the Clenched Fists



The seventeenth glyph, Ollin, on the day-glyph ring establishes the meaning for movement. The large five chalchihuitls establish the number; hence, combined in the central pointer of the calendar, one may read five-movement, Macuilli Ollin. And, obviously the Macuilli Ollin may be read in relation to Tonatiuh at the very center of the calendar.

An additional element for supporting this analysis of the Macuilli Ollin Tonatiuh on the Aztec Calendar as representing the Nahui Ollin *plus* the pointer, at least in my mind, refers to the fact that the word “macuilli” also means “clenched fist”. Note a possible reading that involves the clenched claws/fists within the pointer. There exist then two ways to arrive at the concept of Macuilli Ollin: one involves reading the large five chalchihuitls with the ollin sign, while the other involves reading the two clenched claws (macuilli) with the ollin sign. The two clenched claws (macuilli) within the five (macuilli) chalchihuitls further emphasize a designation of the Macuilli Ollin Tonatiuh; both are in relation to Tonatiuh (Sun)

In a word, the central design of the Aztec Calendar appears to be counter-positioning separately and simultaneously the two worlds in flux: the Nahui Ollin Tonatiuh with the Macuilli Ollin Tonatiuh. The latter, as the incoming Cosmic Age, dominates the other four worlds, or past cosmic ages.

Nahui Ollin as *Nuestra Señora Virgen de Guadalupe*



Nuestra Señora Virgen de Guadalupe has a Nahuatl Ollin on the robe over her stomach. This has been attributed to the roots of the Aztec people at the time of the Conquest in expressing their indigenous religious beliefs within the Catholic religion. The Nahuatl Ollin on the robe of the *Virgen de Guadalupe* resembles a four-leaf clover, with an enlarged central dot. In fact, it appears to be more like a quincunx design. The quincunx design portrays the relationship of four to five, in that it relates the four corner dots to the fifth central dot. The significance becomes one of emphasis; either emphasizing the four worlds or the fifth world coming into being, separately and simultaneously existing alike. In the case of the *Virgen de Guadalupe* the fifth world signifies the coming of the Christ child.

Given the profound concept of time that the peoples of ancient Mesoamerica developed, I should think that the Aztec Calendar would be a monument to the Fifth World, while simultaneously referencing the preceding Four Worlds. The future epoch appears to be emphasized in their visual artwork, with the four destroyed past worlds as a basis of that future. Based on the previous considerations, the significance of the Aztec Calendar references the Fifth World, the Macuilli Ollin Tonatiuh, which was then presently underway. In a word, the monumental Aztec Sunstone is apparently paying homage to the Fifth Sun, as legend would have it. The case may be that in fact this may be its central purpose of design.

The Sign of Earth on the Aztec Calendar



The previous illustration follows the basic design of the four main solar rays of the Aztec Calendar, whereby one may visualize the sign of Earth within the calendar. The flames within the inner circle of the ring of serpents remind me of the Dance of Shiva. The cross itself reminds me of so many colonial crosses sculpted in stone after the Conquest. Today, indigenous peoples all over the world live a life of synthesis with an extremely conflictive history that has been imposed upon them. The artwork within the image of the *Virgen de Guadalupe* has been recognized as being more indigenous to ancient artwork of the Aztecs than to European art based within the Catholic religion. All of these examples represent a translation of conflict into a belief in the Macuilli Tonatiuh, the Fifth Sun, a future time of hope.

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