



The Aztec Calendar Stone

Art of Mexico

Rebecca Hinson

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In loving memory of my Grandma, Ellen Frances Stephens Hinson

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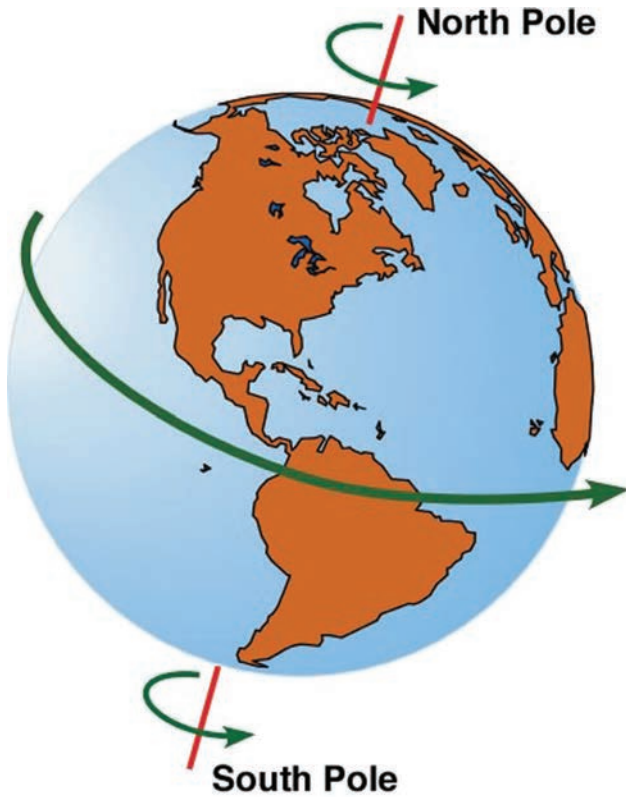
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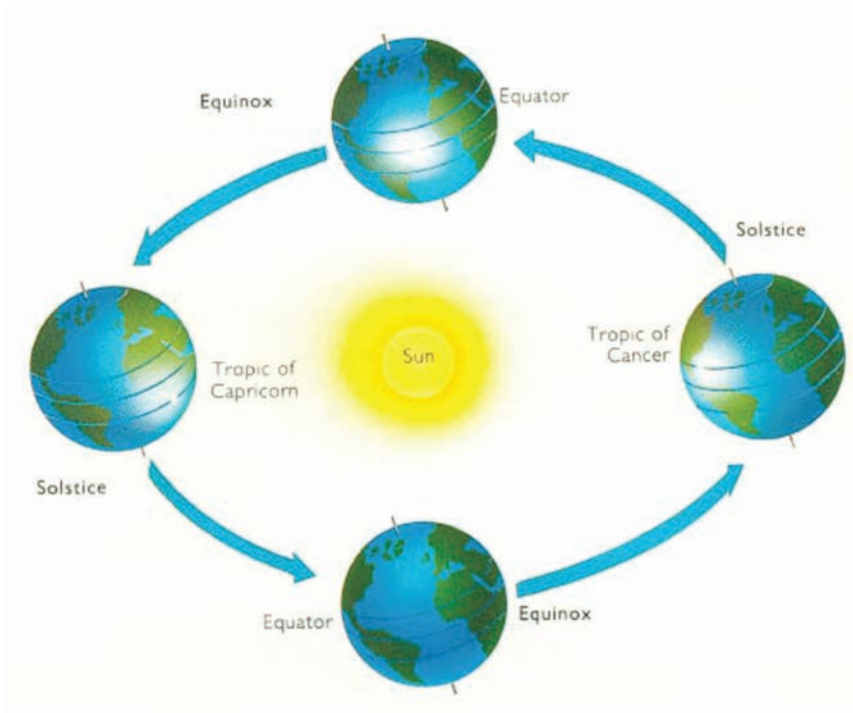
Over 600 years ago, the Aztecs created stone pyramids with temples for worshipping their gods. The pyramid at Tenayuca was dedicated to the gods Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc. It is still standing today. Atop the pyramid, the Aztecs studied the night sky. They observed astronomical cycles and created myths, which were later recorded in the Aztec Calendar Stone.



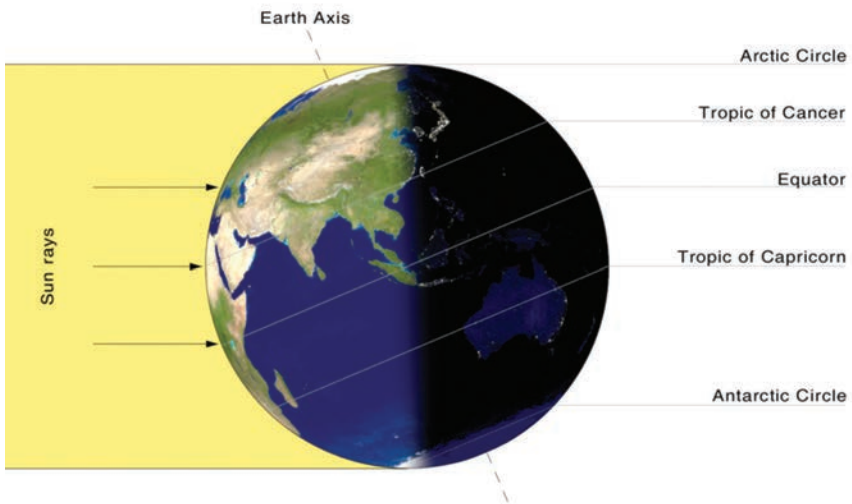
Pyramids were built throughout the Aztec empire and other cultures of Mesoamerica. They were often placed in the best locations for studying the stars and the moon. Through their observations the Mesoamericans identified cyclical epochs, years, months, and days, which they used to regulate feasts, agriculture, and commerce.



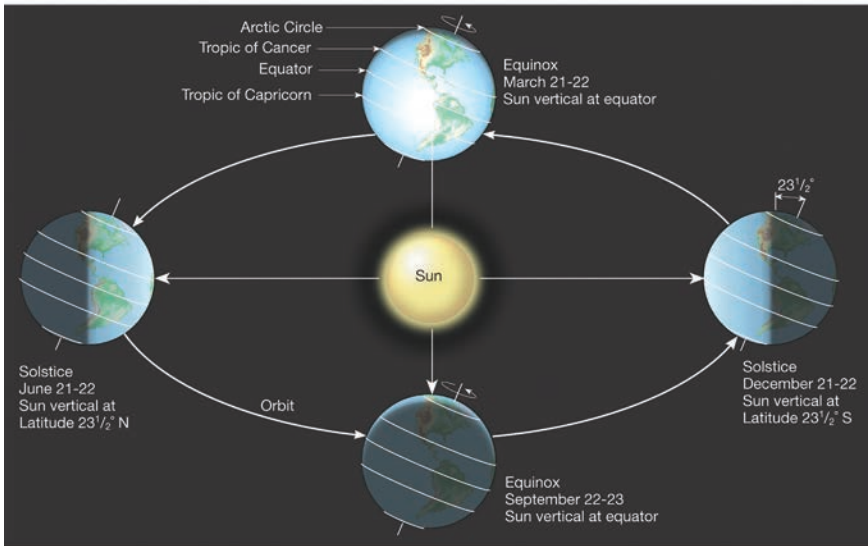
Today we understand that the Earth spins on its axis every 24 hours. The Aztecs didn't measure time in hours as we do today, and they didn't know about the earth's axis.



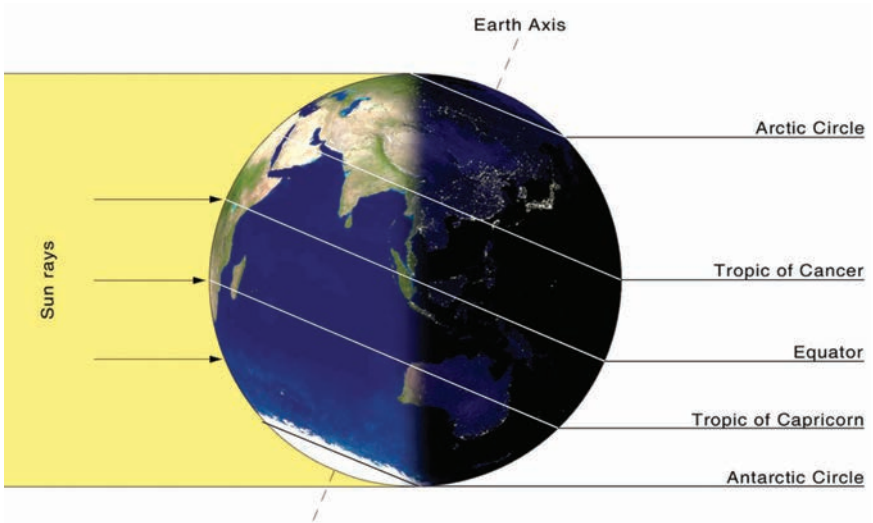
However, they observed the changing position of the sun on the horizon at sunrise. From these observations, they organized their 365-day solar calendar. They didn't realize that the Earth travels around the sun, as we understand today.



The Aztecs believed their gods created rainy and dry seasons. Today, we understand that the orbit of the earth around the sun in combination with the tilt of the earth's axis, causes seasons. When the northern end of the earth's axis tilts toward the sun, it is the longest day and the shortest night of the year in the northern hemisphere. We call that day the summer solstice.



When the earth's axis does not tilt toward or away from the sun, the daytime and nighttime are equal in length. We call that day the equinox. It occurs each year in the seasons we call fall and spring.



When the northern end of the earth's axis tilts away from the sun, we have the shortest day and the longest night of the year in the northern hemisphere. We call that day the winter solstice.



When the days are longer and the sun is high in the sky, the weather is hot. We call that season summer.



When the days and nights are about equal in length, the weather turns cooler. We call that season fall.



The Aztecs organized their calendar into 18 months of 20 days, plus five extra days, for the solar year, and 13 months of 20 days, for the 260-day ritual calendar. Days are depicted by 20 symbols, which form the interior circle of the calendar. At the center, four large rectangles symbolize the four previous epochs, each with its own sun.