

# Andrzej Wierciński

---

## Dark and light side of the Aztec Stone Calendar and their symbolical significance

---

Contributions in New World Archaeology nr 1, 105-109

---

1977

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

ANDRZEJ WIERCIŃSKI

## DARK AND LIGHT SIDE OF THE AZTEC STONE CALENDAR AND THEIR SYMBOLICAL SIGNIFICANCE

1. The Aztec Stone Calendar (ASC) represents a structural model of World's processes which is expressed as concentrically organised system of the iconic-numerical signs. It corresponds to the Mandala concept which constituted the basis of astrobiological ideologies flourishing in all the ancient centers of urbanised civilisations (Wierciński 1976). Its essence consists of the dynamic and informational principle of a transformation of the Absolute. One into pairs of polarised opposites which, in turn, create the universal and organising system of cardinal points of time-spatial order of rhythmic repetitions of the cosmic, biological and social processes, mutually synchronised. Its typical and simplified symbol is quincunx, so frequently appearing in the ASC.

In order to know that the structure of ASC not only includes the information about purely astronomical counting of time is enough to mention the presence of the signs of 5 Cosmic Eras.

2. The main axis of exceptionally rigid symmetry of ASC is marked out by the arrow of the central sign of 4-Ollin. Its point passes into one of four main arrow-heads of the cardinal directions which, in turn, hits the sign of 13-Acatl. The latter one separates the tails of Xiuhcoatl. The feathered end passes into the opposite cardinal arrow-head which separates the heads of both Fire-Snakes.

In this way, the axis below-above has been precised and the division into the left and right halves of ASC as well. This two-fold division is already marked out in the same central arrow, namely, by two quincunxes at its feathered end.

Our aim is to show that this division may represent, among others, the principle of polarisation into the opposites. If so, it should manifest itself in the meaning of symbolical elements which are assymetrical in reference to themselves in both halves of ASC.

In this respect, the following elements may be listed:

- 1.1—4 signs on both sides of the central arrow,
- 1.2—4 signs of the previous Cosmic Eras,
- 1.3— $2 \times 10$  signs of Tonalpohualli days and
- 1.4—the physiognomies of two deities appearing in the mouths of Xiuhcoatl.

3. The decipherment of the four first symbols connected with the central arrow, i.e.: the complex of attributes of the dead warrior and Xiuhtecuhtli (xiuhitzolli, aztaxelli, pectoral adornment and ya coxihuitl) without numeral, 1-Quiahuitl, 7-Ozomatli and 1-Tecpatl, is a most difficult task owing to a greater number of various possible meanings. Their interpretation suggested by H. Beyer (1921) that they represent simply the signs of 4 cardinal points is not very convincing, since the latter ones have been so distinctly marked out by the 4 main arrow-heads located at the prolongation of the central arrow and both rings of Tlachtlí of the sign 4-Ollin.

First of all, it should be emphasized that 1-Quiahuitl and 7-Ozomatli may denote only the dates of the days and, consequently, 1-Tecpatl will not be the date of the year but the date of a day too. Secondly, since the complex of adornment attributes has been ascribed to Xiuhtecuhtli, it is probable that the remaining signs also will denote the proper deities being presumably their calendric names. If so, 1-Quiahuitl does not signify Tlaloc (as it was supposed by Beyer) but Llamatecuhtli and, 1-Tecpatl may be the name of Huitzilopochtli or Camaxtli or Mixcoatl and not that of Black Tezactlipoca (see Caso 1963). Unfortunately, there is a lack of information as regards the exact mythological meaning of 7-Ozomatli. The very symbol of Monkey appears not only in association with Xochipilli but also in calendric names of Itzapalotl, Huehucoyotl and Tecciztecatl but, with different numerals. However, we may follow Beyer that 7-Ozomatli should be rather connected with Xochipilli since, it appears together with his temple in the codices of Feyervary-Meyer and Vaticanus B and, since Xochipilli has been invariably associated with odd numerals. Also, 1-Tecpatl seems to be here rather bound with Huitzilopochtli than with Camaxtli or Mixcoatl because this date is more richly and intimately related to this principal tribal god and, is more important in such connections, in the mythical history of Aztecs.

Consequently, we receive a first opposition: Xiuhtecuhtli and Llamatecuhtli versus Huitzilopochtli and Xochipilli, the latter both solar deities, which might correspond to the opposition of the terrestrial (left) and heavenly (right) regions. In the actual state of our knowledge, a more detailed analysis of symbolical significances of all the mentioned above signs as the mythical dates will be premature, as well as, their associations with the cardinal points. In reference to the latter question, only Huitzilopochtli can be rigidly connected with the South while the creative and omnipresent god like Xochipilli appears not merely in the West but also (and frequently) in the East, South and North or, in the Upper Centre while Xiuhtecuhtli, inhabiting "Ombligo de la Tierra", may appear in the West, East or South (see, for example, the comments of E. Seler on the Codex Borgia, 1963). The cardinal position of Llamatecuhtli is difficult to define.

4. Next comes the question of the possible left-right opposition between the signs of 4 Cosmic Eras which seems to be reversed in reference to the previously described symbols. Thus, with 4-Ehecatl and 4-Quiahuitl are

associated the elements Air and Fire while, with 4-Ocelotl and 4-Atl, Earth and Water. It corresponds to the opposition of subtle elements against the heavier ones.

Another polarisation stems from the cardinal points which may be ascribed to the Cosmic Eras, i.e.: West and South on the left side and, North and East, on the right one. Here we are in some disagreement with Seler (1923) who assigned 4-Ehecatl to the East and 4-Atl to the West. However, it is worthy of notice that in all the four cases, the upper posterior corners of rectangles forming the signs of 4 Suns fall exactly at the beginnings of 4 respective signs of Tonalpohualli sequence, i.e.: Acatl, Tecpatl, Calli and Tochtli which are precisely the names of the solar years of tlalpilli, with well known relations to the cardinal directions. Accordingly, the proper reading of the sequence of the Suns will be: 1. Atonatiuh (East-Acatl), 2. Yohualtonatiuh (North-Tecpatl), 3. Ehecotonatiuh (Calli-West) and 4. Tleltonatiuh (South-Tochtli) what fully agrees with the evidence of Ixtliochitl and Codex Vaticanus A and, partially, with the chronicles from Quauhtitlan, being at variance with the *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas* and *Histoire de Mechique*. However, in the latter case, the Eras start also with the Sun of Chalchiuhtlicue.

5. Interesting conclusions may be drawn from the comparison of symbolical meaning of the two, left and right, sequences of Tonalpohualli signs of days and their Lords, hidden behind them. A possibility of their treatment as polarised entities is evidently demonstrated by two well known pictures from the Codex Borgia where Mictlantecuhtli and Quetzalcoatl as the Lords of Death and Life preside various divisions of Tonalpohualli days into two equal sequences. One of them refers to terrestrial region and the other one, to heavenly region.

In the ASC, left sequence of 10 signs, starting from Cipactli and ending on Itzcuintli, has been opposed against the right sequence, from Ozomatli to Xochitl. The total meaning of a given sequence may be drawn from a more detailed analysis of its particular components.

Thus, Cipactli denotes fruitful Earth floating in waters of primeaval ocean, with creative and providential Tonacatecuhtli and Tonacacihuatl. A polyvalent meaning has also Ehecatl with Quetzalcoatl but, already Calli is a temple-house of the setting Tonatiuh and, logically, its Lord is Tepeyollohtli, the underground god of caves and earthquakes. In Mayas Tzolkin, the sign Akbal (= night) well corresponds to Calli. Cuetzpallin is an earthly animal and appears in one of the Underworld's zones according to B. Sahagun. Its patron deity is Huehucoyotl who governs dark and orgiastic forces, both creative and destructive and, in Codex Borgia, he is accompanied by a mysterious infernal bird. Also Coatl is here the animal of the Underworld, placed in one of its zones, what is strengthened by its connection with Chalchiuhtlicue, night sacrifice and similar, demoniacal bird.

The undoubted dark and lunar meanings bears Miquiztli together with

Tecciztecatl. Mazatl, beyond its rich symbolism as a feminine coelestial fire is also a numen of Earth without water and Tlaloc as its Lord may be regarded here rather as Night deity, since he is associated in Codex Borgia with the lunar water with conches which stems from a burning temple. Also, terrestrial, dark and Underworld's or lunar meanings should be ascribed to Tochtli, with Mayahuel or Black Tezcatlipoca, to Atl and Itzcuintli with Mictlantecuhtli, while Xiuhtecuhtli and Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli are more polyvalent.

If so, in a considerable majority of cases of the days of the left sequence, we deal with the symbols of Earth, Moon and Underworld. Of course, it does not signify that all of them are evil in their astrological contents...

On the contrary, the right sequence of days shows the concentration of the light, creative or solar meanings, though, not devoided of their opposites. To the first ones belong: Ozomatli with solar and creative Xochipilli, Cuauhtli and Cozacuauhtli as the solar birds, with Red Tezcatlipoca or Xipe Totec, Ollin as the sign of Tonatiuh and Xochitl with creative Xochiquetzal. But, the latter, more or less, dark or destructive meanings may be attributed to Acatl, with Tezcatlipoca-Ixquimilli or Itztlacoliuhqui, to Malinalli with mysterious though creative Patecatl, Ocelotl with Tlazeoltlotl, Itz'papalotl, to Tecpatl with Chalchiuhtotolin and to a more ambivalent Chantico and Xolotl-Nanahuatzin.

However, it should be emphasized on the other hand, that in another list of gods of the days in Codex Borgia, Tonatiuh in the solar disc is associated with Malinalli, a solar god of sacrifices—with Acatl, as well as, Chalchiuhtotolin is a daily version of Tezcatlipoca. Another characteristic feature of the Lords of the right sequence is that (with one exception of Quetzalcoatl) their thrones in Codex Borgia are adorned by stylised birds.

6. Finally, there remain the physiognomies of the two gods appearing in the mouths of both, left and right Xiuhcoatl.

It seems that Beyer (1921) has established their most probable affinities.

Thus, the right face represents Tonatiuh, since he wears all the characteristic attributes of the physiognomy from the center of ASC which is undoubtedly Tonatiuh too, owing to solar face painting and straight hair

The left physiognomy may be presumably ascribed to Xiuhtecuhtli, owing to a lack of Tonatiuh's attributes at the forehead and in the ears what is combined with the typical painture of the lower half of the face and a special adornment of the nose.

These affinities solve the question of the polarisation of both Snakes of Time and Fire. The right Xiuhcoatl, marked out by Tonatiuh is the Snake of Day and Light, while the left one should be its opposite. It is so, especially, if Xiuhtecuhtli would be considered here in his more specific manifestation as the Lord of the Polar Star and the Central Fire in "Omblico de la Tierra". Also, it is worthy of notice that all his known calendric names (4-Cipactli, 1-Tochtli and 1-Itzcuintli) belong exclusively to the left sequence

of Tonalpohualli days, a property which Xiuhtecuhtli shares only with Mictlantecuhtli and Micxtecacihuatl, Tlaltecuhlli, Iztapaltotec and hundreds gods of pulque. Also, he is the Lord of the day Atl from the left side.

However, still another alternative may be considered too, namely, that of Tlaltecuhlli. Her physiognomy is also adorned by the lower facial painture and, the analogical tecpatl emerges from her mouth. Moreover, the present author during his stay in Mexico in 1974 has had the opportunity to look carefully again at the original of ASC deposited in the National Museum of Anthropology. After this examination he observed on the damaged cheek of the left physiognomy something as the trace of a chalchinuitl what should be verified by a more detailed, possibly photogrammetric investigation. If this observation is right, the Tlaltecuhlli's affinities would be safely established (see Heyder 1971).

In any case, it will not change the essential meaning of the left Xiuhcoatl but, it will be still more specified in favour of an earthly significance and more symbolically symmetrical to the meaning of the right physiognomy of Tonatiuh.

At the same time, worthy of mentioning is that the calendric names of Tonatiuh (4-Ollin and 13-Acatl) are exclusively derived from the right sequence of days, as well as, he presides the day Quiahuitl (exchangeably with Chantico) and, less specifically, the days Malinalli and Acatl which are positioned at the right side too. The left-right opposition of both Snakes of Fire and Time was also fully recognised by A. Caso (1963).

At last, we may mention clear polarisation (though not in the sense of bilateral symmetry) discernible in the very centre of ASC, i.e., in the main components of the sign 4-Ollin which consists of Tlachtli as the symbol of Earth and the face of Tonatiuh who represents and governs the Sun.

In conclusion, all these considerations seem to demonstrate that the Aztec Stone Calendar in its left—right division, as well as, in its center, is strongly penetrated by the principle of polarisation into the opposites.

#### REFERENCES CITED

- BEYER, H.  
1921 *El llamado Calendario Azteca*, Mexico
- CASO, A.  
1958 *The Aztecs—People of the Sun*, University Oklahoma Press, Oklahoma City  
1963 *Los calendarios prehispánicos*, Universidad Nacional Autónoma, Mexico
- HEYDEN, D.  
1971 *Comentarios sobre la Coatlicue recuperada durante las excavaciones realizadas para la construcción del Metro*. "Anales I. N. A. H.", vol. II, p. 153-170, Mexico
- SELER, E.  
1923 *Gesamelte Abhandlungen zur Amerikanischen Sprach- und Altertumskunde*, Berlin  
1963 *Comentarios al Codice Borgia*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico—Buenos Aires
- WIERCINSKI A.  
1976 *Time and Space in the Sun Pyramid from Teotihuacan*, see p. 87-103 in this volume