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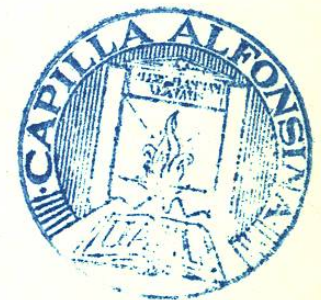
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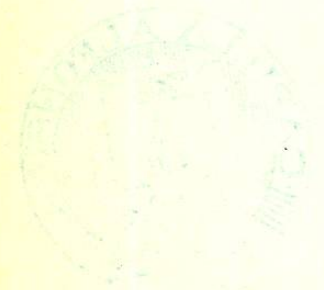
BY  
W. W. BLAKE.



MEXICO.

Blake & Fiske, Gante 8.

1906



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THE  
AZTEC CALENDAR

BY  
W. W. BLAKE.



FONDO  
FERNANDO DIAZ RAMIREZ

MEXICO.

Blake & Fiske, Gante 8.

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IN the year 1479 A. D., thirteen years before Columbus discovered America, a large stone zodiac was carved at Coyoacan by the Aztecs and brought to ancient Tenochtitlan, the site of the present city of Mexico.

Eighty-five years later Tezozomoc, the native Indian historian, wrote (in 1564) as follows:

"In the year Twelve Rabbit, (that is, 1478 A. D.,) two years before the death of King Axayacatl, who in that epoch ruled the world, it came to pass that the high priests reminded him that he had made a solemn vow and spoke to him after this manner: 'The temple in which the great sacrifices are to be made is nearing completion. Thou, thyself, hast erected it. Thou didst vow to adorn it with monuments of great beauty, that our god, Huitzilopochtli, the sustainer and defender of our race, might there take his seat with pleasure. Time flies and thou canst no longer delay'. 'I think,' replied the King, 'to substitute the Sacrificial stone which my father formerly dedicated to the sun-god, with another new one. Remove the old stone but preserve it carefully. I will give food and raiment to the laborers that will bring me a great rock, and I will give gold, chocolate and painted cloths to the sculptors that will engrave upon it the image of the sun surrounded with our zodiacal sign.'

"Immediately the laborers sallied forth and broke off a great fragment of rock; 5,000 strong men dragged it along. But, when it reached the bridge of Xoloc, the beams were broken into a thousand pieces, and fell into the water, and nobody dared attempt to draw it from the depths of the lake. Then the king was very wroth and said: 'Make a new bridge with double beams and stages and tear me out a new fragment from the mountains of Coyoacan; bring also another rock and make of it a vase in which shall be caught the blood that will issue from the Sacrificial stone as an offering of reconciliation to our god.'"

The historian tells how all this was done; the rocks were torn out of the mountain side, dragged to Tenochtitlan, passed the bridge of Xoloc safely, and were duly dedicated with great festivities and sacrifices. From a painting in the Codex Mendocino we see that this Calendar Stone must have been moved by means of a long file of men who dragged it with ropes over great wooden rollers, in the same manner in which the ancient Egyptians moved enormous blocks of granite for their pyramids.

This zodiac is eleven feet eight inches in diameter. It is a monolith

of dark gray porphyry, and Alexander von Humboldt calculated its weight at 24,400 kilograms, or 53,792 pounds avoirdupois, or over 26 tons. This enormous weight shows the immense difficulties the Aztecs surmounted in transporting it several leagues to their great temple.

The rock was originally placed in a horizontal position in the Eighth House of the great temple of Mexico. King Axayacatl invited all the rulers of all the neighboring friendly nations to be present at the ceremonies of its dedication, which took place in the year Two House, or 1481 A. D. The thirteen priests of the thirteen principal gods of Mexico, armed with their obsidian knives for the sacrifice, ascended the stone before dawn of the day of its inauguration. Seven hundred and twenty-eight captives, reserved from those taken in the battle of Tliliuhtepec, decked with gay plumage, were placed near the stone. At sunrise a priest with a pot of smoking incense marched four times around the stone and then threw the pot upon it to be shattered to pieces.

Immediately King Axayacatl ascended to the rock and began the sacrifice by tearing out the hearts of the victims, throwing them into the stone vase mentioned by the historian Tezozomoc, and now in the National Museum. When he had thus sacrificed fifty-two men, he was followed by the thirteen priests in succession, until the seven hundred and twenty-eight prisoners were slain. Tezozomoc says that Axayacatl drank of the blood and ate of the flesh of the victims to excess, and that his death not long afterwards was the direct result of this debauch.

In the year 1521 the indomitable Cortés, with his little band of Spanish adventurers, concluded the conquest of Mexico by pulling down all the temples. This rock, and many large idols, and other objects of worship, were buried in the surrounding marshes by order of the Christian monks, to hide them from the eyes of the heathen. It came to the surface in 1551, and was reinterred in the year 1558 by order of the Archbishop Montufar, who was greatly shocked at sight of the heathen emblems. After the second interment it was entirely forgotten. During the succeeding 232 years not one of the many writers on Mexican antiquities mentioned its existence. Therefore it was a wondrous revelation when, on the 17th of December, 1790, in lowering the grade of the pavement of the Plaza in front of the Cathedral, in order to make it level with the street, this notable monument was rediscovered. It was found in an old sewer eighteen inches below the surface, at a spot 100 feet north of the Portal de Flores and 220 west of the National Palace. The wardens of the Cathedral begged it of the viceroy, who gave verbal order that it should be delivered to them on condition that it should be preserved and exposed in a public place. They accordingly built it into the base of the southwestern tower of the cathedral, and there it remained until August, 1885. It had however always been considered as the property of the National museum and, for preservation from the elements,

it was finally removed thither. The great mass of stone was carried at the rate of a few feet daily for several weeks until it finally reached its present resting-place, in September, 1885. It stands out in bold relief from the south wall of the lower salon.

Within the innermost circle of this zodiac, the great face, its sacred mask, circular ear-drops, stone necklace, protruding tongue, all are a representation now very well known of "Tonatiuh," the sun. The sign 'Ome Acatl', which it bears upon its forehead, refers to the year Two Reed. The symbol One Rabbit with which they formerly began their cycle was considered as an evil omen, because of the mortality occasioned by the great droughts that accidentally occurred on the years corresponding to this symbol. The tribe to remedy this resolved to reform the calendar, transferring to the year "Two Reed" the commencement of each age. This correction was made in the year 1454 A. D., as here shown.

The second large circle contains four parallelograms, indicating in Aztec mythology that the sun had died four times. These epochs or ages were arranged as follows: Age of Air or wind, Age of Water, Age of Fire, Age of Earth; and may have been interpreted thus:

Age of Air, the glacial epoch, embodying their traditions of the ice-bound lands of the North from which their forefathers had come; Age of Water, the submerging of the continent of Atlantis; Age of Fire, eruptions of the volcanoes with their accompanying earthquakes; Age of the Earth, beginning 4431 years before Christ and ending 1312 A. D.

Using these same four squares to represent the seasons in their complex system, the Aztecs placed Winter in the upper left hand square, and indicated its strength by the head of an ocelotl, or leopard; Spring, which was their warmest season, in the lower left hand square, its head indicated by the sign calli or house, because in the house is the hearth where the fire is preserved; Summer, their season of rains, in the lower right hand square—its waters indicated by the sign acatl or reed; and Autumn, in the upper right hand square—its harvest indicated by the sign tochtli or rabbit. The seasons began at the equinoxes and solstices, just as should our own. With the "deaths" of the first three suns the great catastrophes that placed the race in danger of perishing had ended, and under this aspect the conclusion of the fourth Age was still some cycles distant. But Chavero says the Mexicans, in their pride, made an innovation by inventing a fifth Sun, which should pertain to them alone. They, who wished to have a god of their own, to have a place designated by the gods as a heaven for themselves alone, and to be a chosen and peculiar people, wished also a Sun of their own. Accordingly, in the year 1312, on the day in which they trod for the first time the islet in the lake where the City of Mexico now stands; on the day in which they beheld, in the spot where now is the public fountain in the

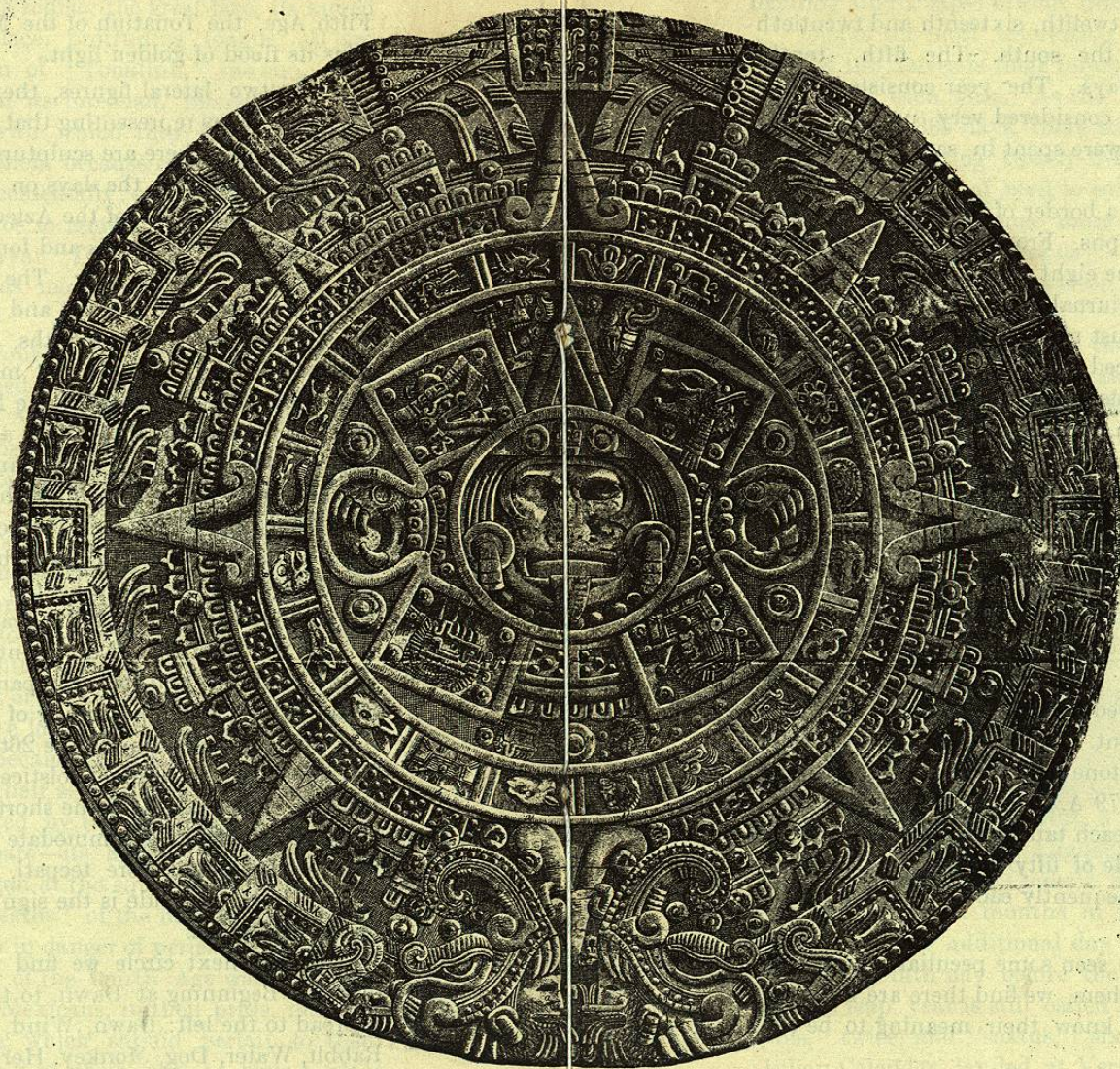
Plaza of Santo Domingo, the eagle poised on the cactus with the serpent in its claws, with the blue sky above and the blue waters beneath; on that day and there, upon the heads of that group of pilgrims, upon the forehead of Tenoch, the venerable chief of their tribe, the Sun of the Fifth Age, the Tonatiuh of the Mexicans, poured from the high heavens its flood of golden light.

The two lateral figures, therefore, at each side of the central face are eagle talons representing that the Sun of the fifth Age is still soaring in the zenith. There are sculptured beneath the face the dates One Rain and Eight Monkey, the days on which the sun passed through the meridian of the Capital of the Aztec Empire in the year 1479. In each claw there are five glyphs and four dots the total of eighteen representing the months of the year. The priests who worshipped Quetzalcoatl, the God of Air, had a secret and sacred Calendar in which the year had but 260 days or twenty months, with thirteen days in each month. It was based upon the apparent movements of the planet Venus, which shone for them 260 days as the Morning Star and 260 as the Evening Star. If we sum up all the dots and glyphs that there are in the central figure, they give us the sacred number seventy-two, which is the number of priests' years that equal the cycle of fifty-two civil years.

Above the face is seen the point of an arrow, representing the meridian of the city of Mexico, and beneath it the feathered shaft containing five glyphs, representing the week of five days. The five large dots are the five extra days of the year.

At the right side of the point of the arrow are seen the signs ce tecpatl, One Flint, and its accompanying tletl, or stone knife, which gave a date falling at the beginning of the tenth month of the priestly calendar, and corresponding to the 26th of June. This day was celebrated by the priests as the summer solstice, or period of the greatest strength of the sun. They sacrificed the short difference which there might be from the true solstice to accommodate the festival to the opening day of a month whose signs were tecpatl, "the Evening Star," and tletl, "the Sun." On the left side is the sign "Two House," 1481 A. D., the year of the dedication.

In the next circle we find the twenty signs of the days of the month. Beginning at Dawn, to the left of the point of the arrowhead, we read to the left: Dawn, Wind, House, Lizard, Serpent, Death, Deer, Rabbit, Water, Dog, Monkey, Herb, Reed, Ocelotl, Eagle, Buzzard, Path of the Sun, Flint Knife, Rain and Flower. Notice the tenth day, Dog. Humboldt remarked that it was the only figure in the zone that had its face turned downwards. Although he saw the original stone, he studied its interpretation from the engraving by Leon y Gama, where it is wrong. In the original it is the same as the rest. The days were divided into four groups with reference to the cardinal points and colors as fol-



**The Aztec Calendar.**