

World Ages in Central Mexico

The concept of World Ages existed in central Mexico among the Aztecs and others, in traditional accounts of the five "Suns". Corn was discovered before the current Sun. These traditions were not everywhere the same.

The Maya Popol Vuh presents a tradition of successive attempts by the gods to create human beings who will worship them, and of destructions of the failed creations by different elements. There is nothing in the Popol Vuh permitting dating of these, at least not using currently available tools of demonstrated reliability. According to these traditions, corn was discovered before the successful creation of the present race of human beings.

These two traditions very likely include portions which go back to a common source. This much is more than merely conceivable, it is plausible and even probable. So many other things are shared across Mesoamerica, there is no reason to exclude the possibility that parts of this framework also were shared. For example, beings of one of the previous creations were turned into monkeys in each of the two traditions, though it is not the same creation in order (for the Maya, the race immediately preceding the present people made of corn; for the Legend of the Suns in Central Mexico, the beings of the second Sun, three before the present Sun. For a nice survey, see Miller & Taube 1993 pp.68-71.

The Mayan Calendrical dilemma

(discussed with available evidence on another page in this series):

The Mayan calendar system clearly has a count which began with 11 August, 3114 BCE. And a number of references to dates before that point. A tiny number of them use a notation beginning with 12 Baktuns which is consistent with the naming of the "era date" itself as 13.0.0.0.0, and which accurately specify dates before that point, verifiable as correct because also specified by distance numbers linking to dates in the current era. But there are no (?) references to a date another 13 Baktuns back in time from 11 August 3114 BC. And only one reference to a date 13.0.0.0.0 which from its Calendar Round must be the one in 2012 CE. It is on Tortuguero Mon.6, whose text is damaged, and which cannot be interpreted (at least as of 2008) to refer to any concept of "World Age". From its remaining text it probably does not refer to that. We do not even know from this text alone whether one Baktun beyond that future date is to be notated as 14.0.0.0.0 or as 1.0.0.0.0. For the Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque, the correct answer must be 14.0.0.0.0, because $1.0.0.0.0 = 20.0.0.0.0$. Further, the use of "13" may well be not for counting, but to carry a symbolic value. Strings of multiple "13"s are a strong suggestion in this direction. Again, for details please see the discussion on another page.

There is thus apparently no factual evidence for a sequence of Mayan periods of 13 Baktuns, one after another, whether three or five or seven of them or any other number. And the existence of such a concept appears to be excluded by the evidence we do have (from Palenque, Temple of the Inscriptions). So we cannot currently link the Mayan Calendar to Central Mexican "World Ages", nor even to Mayan "World Ages" as some would have it. Yet the number 13 is prominent also in the Central Mexican tradition.

Central Mexican Traditions:

The Aztec tradition is known from the famous *Leyenda de los Soles* "Legend of the Suns", part of the *Codex Chimalpopoca* (Bierhorst 1992). This tradition does contain purported calendrics, but ones which are inconsistent and difficult to make use of. All of the year names carry heavy symbolic connotations in later times, and may have been read back into the stories. All of the lengths of the world ages are divisible by 52 ($676 = 13 \times 52$, $364 = 7 \times 52$, $312 = 6 \times 52$) and thus could not change the year names, yet the year names are

different (1 Reed, 1 Flint, 1 Flint, 1 House). So there would have to be additional intervals between the world ages which are multiples of 13 but not of 52 years.

The total below may be $(13 + 7 + 6 + 13) \times 52$ years, or else there may be an additional 52 while the land was covered by water.

First Sun	4 Jaguar	676 years	People ate straw. Were eaten by jaguars starting on a day 4 Jaguar. Their year was 1 Reed.
Second Sun	4 Wind	364 years	People ate 12 Snake. They were blown away in one day on a day sign 4 Wind, and turned into Monkeys. Their year was 1 Flint.
Third Sun	4 Rain	312 years	People ate 7 Flint. They were destroyed in one day by a rain of fire, and were changed into Turkeys (etc.). Their year was 1 Flint.
Fourth Sun	4 Water	676 years	People ate 4 Flower. They were destroyed in one day by water when the skies came falling down, and were turned into fish. All the mountains disappeared. The water lay for 52 years. Their year was 1 House. One couple survived in a sealed canoe, ate one corn kernel each, were punished for drilling fire and turned into dogs.

It was dark for 25 years.

In a year 1 Rabbit the sky was established.

In a year 2 Reed the skies were again smoked
(origin of new fire ceremony).

New people are created from ground-up bones retrieved from underworld, together with blood.
Corn is discovered and brought from food mountain.

Fifth Sun 4 Movement Present era (Destructions will be by earthquakes)

Variations in Central Mexico:

Some source [need to find and cite] points out that it appears the Mexica modified the cosmology to include a Fifth Sun as a means of legitimizing themselves. There are other traditions which speak of four Suns only. There is no tradition which speaks of a sixth world age, thus no age after the present one (thanks to Mark Van Stone for this last important point).

Other Traditions:

The Codex Rios = Vaticanus A has on some of its early pages counts which are probably of years, but from an unknown base date. Anders & Jansen (1996 pp.54ff) interpret the large bundles (?) marked with hairs (Nahua *tzontli* also meaning 'caballera, es decir edad' [age]) as 400 years each, the small circles as one year each, to give their total years. This is what the Italian glosses in the original say they mean. They also cite the information from the *Legend of the Suns*, which is different (see here above). As an alternative, we might assume that the large bundles are 52 year cycles. Anders & Jansen (1996 p.55 note 13) compare the Mixtec term cited by Alvarado referring to a period of 52 years, which is *ee dzini* and literally means 'a head'. This

second assumption yields some similarity to the lengths specified in the *Legend of the Suns*. (Or conceivably the transmission of the *Legend of the Suns* contained a misinterpretation in the reverse direction.)

		Anders & Jansen Total?	alternative here? Total?	Date? Day name	
Folio 4 verso	10@ + 8•	4008	520 + 8	10 Water ?	Great flood; Fish; couple protected inside
Folio 6 recto	10@ +10•	4010	520 +10	1 Dog	Wind; Monkeys; couple inside cave which is also the maw of the earth
Folio 6 verso	12@ + 4•	4804	624 + 4	9 Movement	Rain of Fire; birds; couple inside (tied?) stone ring?
Folio 7 recto	13@ + 6•	5206	676 + 6		

The foods attributed to these ages in this source are:

1. atzitzintli (wild maize, acecintle, Nagundo mexicana Dc.
Garibay 1979 p.31 "una simiente, come de trigo, que nace en el agua")
2. acotzintli (maíz de las alturas, fruits of the forest)
3. cincoco[pi] [cizaña] a plant similar to maíz (Garibay 1979 p.31;
Molina vocabulary "zizania, que parece mata o caña de maíz, y no lo es)

Conclusion:

At present it is very difficult to reconstruct a single "original" version of world eras and creation for Mesoamerica, because traditions differ so much and we cannot be certain which of several variants is older and which is an altered version. Indeed, in many cases there may be no surviving "original" version, all versions we have surely have undergone major changes in the past thousands of years. But the pursuit of new insights remains a valuable goal.