

## THE AZTEC CALENDAR

The Aztecs, like the Mayas and ancient Egyptians, used two different calendars. The first calendar was similar to the one created by the Mayas and handed down through the ages. It was a lunar calendar based on the phases of the Moon. The lunar calendar had 260 days. The Aztecs divided their calendar into 13 months, each having 20 days. They thought this calendar was magical. The priests used the lunar calendar to decide which days would be used for religious ceremonies and rituals. Priests also used this calendar to decide which days were lucky and should be used for important activities such as planting crops or going into battle.



The image of the Sun god Tonatiuh is carved in the center of the Aztec calendar stone. Other carvings represent the Aztec days and religious symbols.

A number of dots represented the months, and each of the 20 days had a name. Each of the days also had a hieroglyph (picture word). The days' names and their hieroglyphs are shown below:



Cipactli  
Crocodile



Ehecatl  
Wind



Calli  
House



Cuetzpallin  
Lizard



Coatl  
Serpent



Miquiztli  
Death's-head



Mazatl  
Deer



Tochtli  
Rabbit



Atl  
Water



Itzcuintli  
Dog



Ozomatli  
Monkey



Malinalli  
Grass



Acatl  
Reed



Ocelotl  
Ocelot



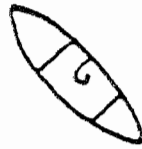
Cuauhtli  
Eagle



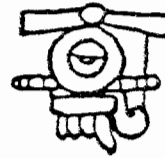
Cozcaquauhtli  
Vulture



Ollin  
Motion



Tecpatl  
Flint Knife



Quiauitl  
Rain



Xochitl  
Flower

Our New Year's day would have appeared on the Aztec calendar as:



( one dot = first month      crocodile = first day )

The Aztecs established their second calendar on the movement of the Sun. Similar to our calendar today, it had 365 days based on the time it took the earth to orbit the Sun. They divided their solar calendar into 18 months each containing 20 days. The extra five days were "nothing" days added to the end of each year. The Aztecs thought these five days were unlucky, so they did not give them names. The Aztec stopped all activities during the five "nothing" days. At the end of the five days, they gave a sacrificial victim in tribute to the gods.

Our calendar has centuries using 100-year divisions. Both of the Aztec calendars used 52-year divisions. The Aztecs had a major celebration at the start of each new 52-year cycle. Part of the celebration included the New Fire Ceremony. The priests extinguished the temple's altar fires, and the citizens let their household fires go out. At midnight of the new era, the priest would light a fire on the chest of a sacrificial victim. The people would then light a fire stick from the altar fire and use it to light their home fires.

One of the important artifacts from the Aztecs is the famous calendar stone. Discovered in 1790, the stone is about 12 feet in diameter and weights 20 tons. In the center of the stone is an image of the Sun god Tonatiuh. Other carvings on the stone represent the Aztec days and religious symbols. Aztec priests may have placed the hearts of sacrificial victims on the stone's center during religious ceremonies.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. What was the Aztec lunar calendar based on?

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2. How many months did the Aztec lunar calendar have?

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3. How many days were in a lunar month?

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4. How did priests determine when to plant crops?

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5. What was the second Aztec calendar based on?

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6. How many days did this calendar have?

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7. How many months did this calendar have?

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8. How many days were in a month?

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9. How did Aztecs deal with the fact that there were five extra days in the second calendar?

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10. What was discovered in 1790?

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