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Permutations in Octavio Paz's 'Piedra de sol'. In: Carpenter, Victoria
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Tunncliffe talks about fifty-two-year bundles in the Aztec Solar Calendar, 'represented by a bundle of reeds tied together and the ceremony held after this period of time had elapsed was known as "The Tying of the Bundle". This was a time of festivals when all of the old fires were extinguished and the new ones were lit.¹³ Fray Bernardino Sahagún contributes to the records of the Aztec solar calendar by picturing 'the fifty-two-year calendar wheel as a kind of spiral in the *Códice Matritenses*.¹⁴ In Chapter 9, Book 7 of *Códice Florentino* Sahagún explains that 'The Tying of the Bundle' celebration was held at the onset of year Two Reed, 'when one by one the four year signs that each reigned thirteen years and when fifty-two years had passed'; then the fifty-two years comprising an age 'were piled up, added one to another, and brought together; wherefore the thirteen-year [cycles] had four times made a circle [...].¹⁵ When two fifty-two-year cycles have run their course, this was known as 'One Old Age'.¹⁶ My initial reading of 'Piedra de sol' saw the poem as a 'bundle' of timelines, not unlike the bundles of the fifty-two-year cycles of the Aztec solar calendar.

Blake describes the ceremony as signifying the beginning of a new life cycle. On the night of the new cycle (Aztec days began the night before), household objects were destroyed, 'supposing them to be useless'.¹⁷ A procession led by priests marched to the Hill of the Star at 9 p.m. 'There, on its summit, when the Constellation of the Pleiades had reached its zenith, upon the breast of a prisoner of war selected for this sacrifice, they kindled with two sticks of wood the new fire. [This was used to light the signal fire at the top of the hill, visible for miles around.], and the people hailed the emblem of light, life and fruition as a blessed omen of ... the preservation of the race for another cycle.¹⁸

The repetitive nature of the Aztec view of the passing of time suggests a spiral arrangement rather than a straightforward circle. This means that

- 13 Tunncliffe, 10.
- 14 Almere Read, 96.
- 15 Sahagún 1977: 25.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Blake, 12.
- 18 Ibid.

instead of the same past, present and future being repeated, there are slight variations on the three temporal areas: 'Unlike a circle that comes back around to precisely the same spot at which it began, a spiral comes back to a position that is slightly ahead of its previous point of departure.'¹⁹ This interpretation of non-linear time in Aztec mythology is based upon Paul Ricoeur's view of the complexity of the past/present/future relationship: 'The pastness of the past is handed down and reoriented toward the future, whereas our expectations are once again rooted in the potentialities inherited from the past.'²⁰ Ricoeur is particularly insistent upon the cyclic nature of time, albeit not necessarily self-replicating. A similar view of the temporality of 'Piedra de sol', strongly influenced by the poem's apparent mirroring of the Aztec calendar, appears repeatedly in the critiques of Paz's work. The most notable of these is John Fein's detailed examination of the representation of the calendar in the four 'parts' of the poem. Fein offers a convincing reading of 'Piedra de sol' by aligning it against the calendar and identifying the sections corresponding to the outer and inner circles of the Sun Stone.²¹ José Quiroga's study of Paz's poetry, and José Emilio Pacheco's often quoted analysis of 'Piedra de sol' make an obligatory reference to the similarity between the calendar and the poem but do not go into the depth of the link the way Fein does. In fact, Quiroga is not convinced that the structure of the poem reflects the calendar.²² Both acknowledge the cyclic nature of the poem and remark upon its complex structure; Quiroga attributes this complexity to surrealist influences,²³ while Pacheco sees it as a never-ending cycle of soul-searching.²⁴

In the introduction to the first edition of 'Piedra de sol', Paz made allusions to the stone artefact of the Aztec solar calendar, currently on display at the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City. The stone calendar was buried along with other objects of worship by the Christian monks 'to

- 19 Almere Read, 117.
- 20 Ricoeur 1985: 17.
- 21 Fein 1986: 15-40.
- 22 Quiroga 1999: 54.
- 23 Quiroga, 52.
- 24 Pacheco 1979: 120.