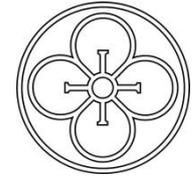


The Two Celestial Zodiacs



An explanation of the difference between the ecliptic celestial zodiac and the equatorial celestial zodiac – by Peter Dawkins

The English word zodiac derives from *zōdiacus*, the Latinized form of the Ancient Greek *zōidiakòs* (ζωδιακός), meaning ‘circle’ or ‘cycle’. In astronomical and astrological terms it has a particular meaning as *zōidiakòs kýklos* (ζωδιακός κύκλος), ‘a circle or cycle of little animals/living beings’, which refers to the ecliptic and the band extending about 8° to either side of the ecliptic that represents the path of the principal planets, Moon and Sun as they move around the celestial sphere. The celestial sphere is an imaginary sphere of infinite extent with the Earth at its centre and on which the stars, planets and other heavenly bodies appear to be located. The ecliptic is the Sun’s path in the sky as observed from the Earth. The description of ‘a circle of little animals or living beings’ refers to the zodiacal constellations through which the ecliptic band passes and which give their names to the signs of the zodiac.

The ecliptic (circle) has a centre, which is represented in the northern hemisphere of the celestial sphere by the north ecliptic pole, and in the southern hemisphere by the south ecliptic pole. The north ecliptic pole is in the constellation Draco; the south ecliptic pole is in the constellation Dorado. The ecliptic pole is also known as the ‘occult pole’, because it is imaginary and not marked by any star, thus hidden from physical sight.

The zodiac, like any circle, can be divided geometrically in various ways, with the division into 12 equal sections being but one of the ways. It is a fundamental pattern found in nature. The 12 equal divisions of the ecliptic, each 30° wide, are called signs, with each bearing the name of the constellation that coincides with it on the ecliptic.

However, because the ecliptic plane is tilted 23.44° with respect to the plane of the celestial equator, since the Earth’s spin axis is tilted 23.44° (23.439281° to be exact) with respect to its orbit around the sun, it should be noted that there are two versions of the celestial zodiac—the **ecliptic celestial zodiac** and the **equatorial celestial zodiac**. The ecliptic celestial zodiac is the basic celestial zodiac, with the ecliptic as its circumference, as defined above. The equatorial celestial zodiac, on the other hand, has the Earth’s equator, projected out to the celestial sphere, as its circumference. In the northern hemisphere this celestial equator is centred on the north celestial pole; in the southern hemisphere it is centred on the south celestial pole. Because of the Earth’s spin, when we look at the stars at night, we see them revolving around the celestial pole. During the course of 24 hours they make one complete revolution, together with the Sun, Moon and planets.

Then, because the Earth is revolving around the Sun, it appears from the Earth that the Sun moves around the ecliptic and through all 12 zodiac signs once every year. The Moon and planets are also seen to be moving around the zodiac, but in time cycles different to that of the Sun.

Because of the Earth’s tilt, the north celestial pole (the north pole of the Earth as projected into the sky) does not coincide with the north ecliptic pole, but is displaced 23.44° from the north ecliptic pole. Moreover, because the Earth also ‘wobbles’ slowly on its axis, the north celestial pole is always moving in a circle around the north ecliptic pole, making one circuit approximately every 25,772 years. The equivalent is happening in the southern hemisphere. This means that the Sun is always appearing to move in precession (i.e. opposite to its movement around the ecliptic during each year); but this precessional movement is slow. It takes the Sun 36 years to pass over a fixed point on the ecliptic (the Sun is half a degree wide) and 72 years to move along one degree of the ecliptic.

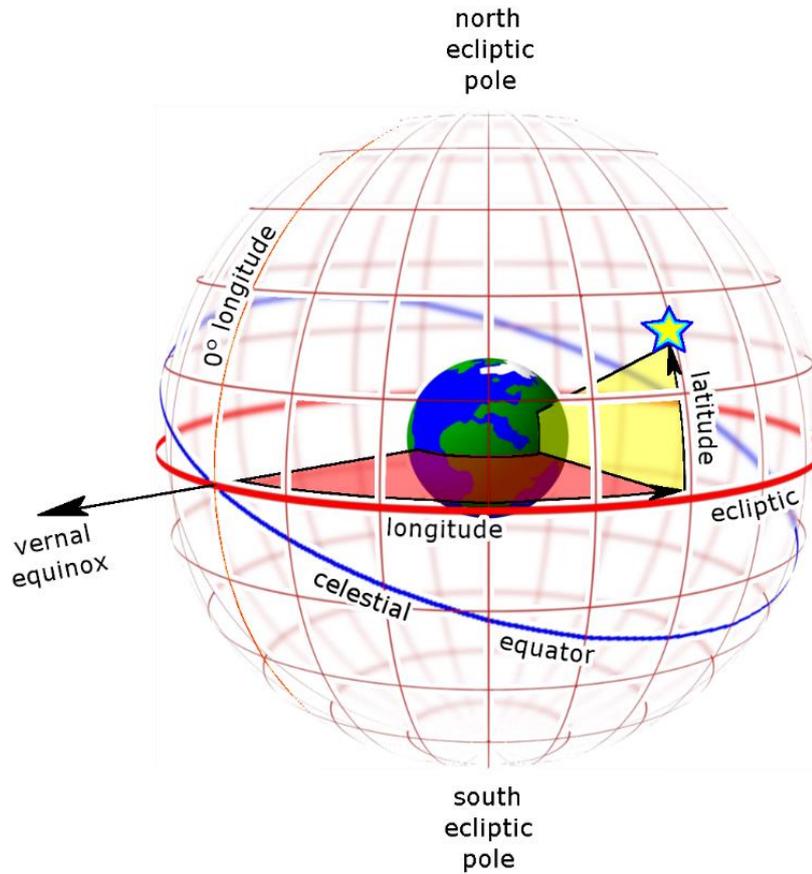


Figure 1: The celestial sphere showing the ecliptic and the celestial equators, their north and south poles, and the equinoctial points where the celestial equator crosses the ecliptic.

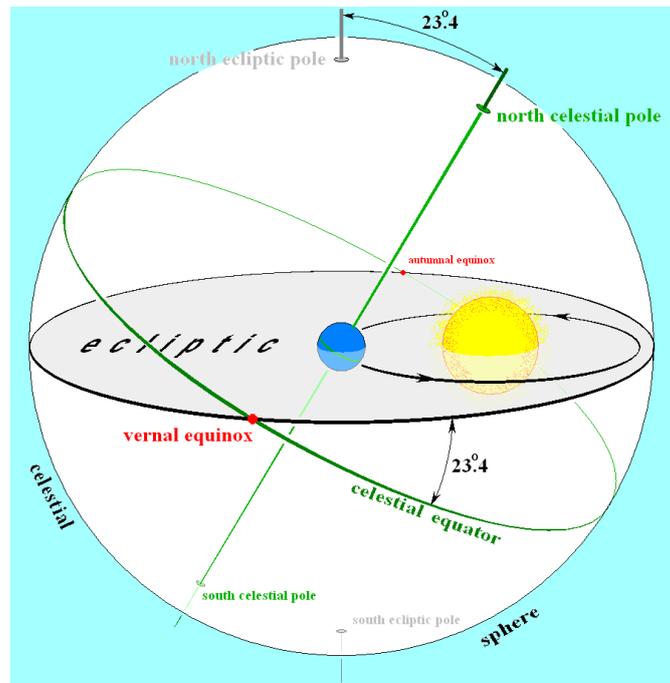


Figure 2: Because of the Earth's tilt, the plane of the celestial equator is tilted 23.44° with respect to the ecliptic plane. The movement of the Earth around the Sun is also indicated.

At the moment, the north celestial pole coincides approximately with the star Arcas of the Ursa Minor constellation (the star's Latin name is Alpha Ursae Minoris). For this reason, we call this star the North Pole Star (Polaris); but because the position of the north celestial pole in the sky is always changing—in fact, one degree of a circle every 72 years—Arcas will not always be our North Pole Star.

The precession of the Sun is the main indicator of great time lengths such as Ages. One Age, for instance, is one-twelfth (30°) of the zodiacal circle, so the length of an Age is approximately 2160 years. For accuracy, the position of the Sun at midsummer and midwinter is used for the calculation, because, due to the Earth's tilt, the equinoctial positions of the Sun are not accurate enough in terms of the ecliptic celestial zodiac.

Right now, for instance, the midsummer Sun is on the cusp of Gemini-Taurus and the midwinter Sun is on the cusp of Sagittarius-Scorpio. 2160 years ago, the midsummer Sun was on the cusp of Cancer-Gemini and the midwinter Sun was on the cusp of Capricorn-Sagittarius. It is the cusps of Gemini-Taurus and Sagittarius-Scorpio that create the primary axis (diameter) of the celestial zodiac, because these two opposite cusps on the ecliptic circle are the two places where the meridian of the Milky Way appears to cross the ecliptic circle, thereby providing the only reliable fixed points as markers on the ecliptic. This is because the stars are always moving, even if only very slightly and slowly.

A Great Age of twelve Ages is determined by when the midsummer Sun is on the cusp of Gemini-Taurus and the midwinter Sun is on the cusp of Sagittarius-Scorpio. The Gemini-Taurus ecliptic cusp coincides with the end of Orion's forefinger, being the point on the ecliptic to which Orion (in old star maps) is pointing and thus identifying. When the midsummer Sun is on this point, the midwinter Sun is on the opposite point of the zodiac, the cusp of Sagittarius-Scorpio. This latter position of the Sun on the ecliptic circle is the closest it can ever get to alignment with the centre of the Milky Way Galaxy. Orion is symbolic of Osiris, the Creator-god, whilst the centre of the Milky Way Galaxy is symbolic of the womb of the Great Mother, wherein divine conception takes place.

Taurus, the Bull, is called the Alpha or first sign of the zodiac, which creates all else. The letter A, Greek *Alpha*, Hebrew *Aleph*, is derived from the bull's head (or ox's head). Taurus rules the throat, via which we speak the Word—the Word being synonymous with the Creator. Its opposite sign, Scorpio, rules the procreative functions. As we go into a new Great Age, these are the two signs in which the Sun will appear at midsummer and midwinter (i.e. Taurus and Scorpio respectively).

Western astrology uses the equatorial celestial zodiac, known as the tropical approach. This equatorial zodiac, centred on the north celestial pole, means that it is off-set from the ecliptic zodiac, meaning that its zodiacal pattern of signs is offset from the true zodiac. This causes a certain distortion, such that, for instance, the two points where the equatorial circle crosses the ecliptic circle are offset from where they would otherwise be if there was no tilt of the Earth. Moreover, this celestial zodiac with its geometry of twelve equal signs is slowly moving round the 'fixed' ecliptic zodiac: hence western astrology is known as the tropical approach, the word tropical being derived from the Greek word *trópos*, 'turn'.

What is called the First Point of Aries is a name given to the crossing point of the equator and the ecliptic at the spring (vernal) equinox. It was named as such by Hipparchus in 130 BCE, when it was located in the western extreme of the constellation of Aries, near its border with Pisces and the star γ Arietis. Due to the Sun's movement across the sky throughout the year, from Pisces to Aries, etc., this was used to mark the moment at which the Sun enters, from Pisces, the constellation of Aries: hence the name 'First Point of Aries'. It is not actually the real cusp of Aries-Pisces in terms of the ecliptic zodiac.

At the time of Hipparchus, the north celestial pole was located on the cusp of Cancer-Gemini, 30° away from the star Arcas on the cusp of Gemini-Taurus. (See Figure 3.)

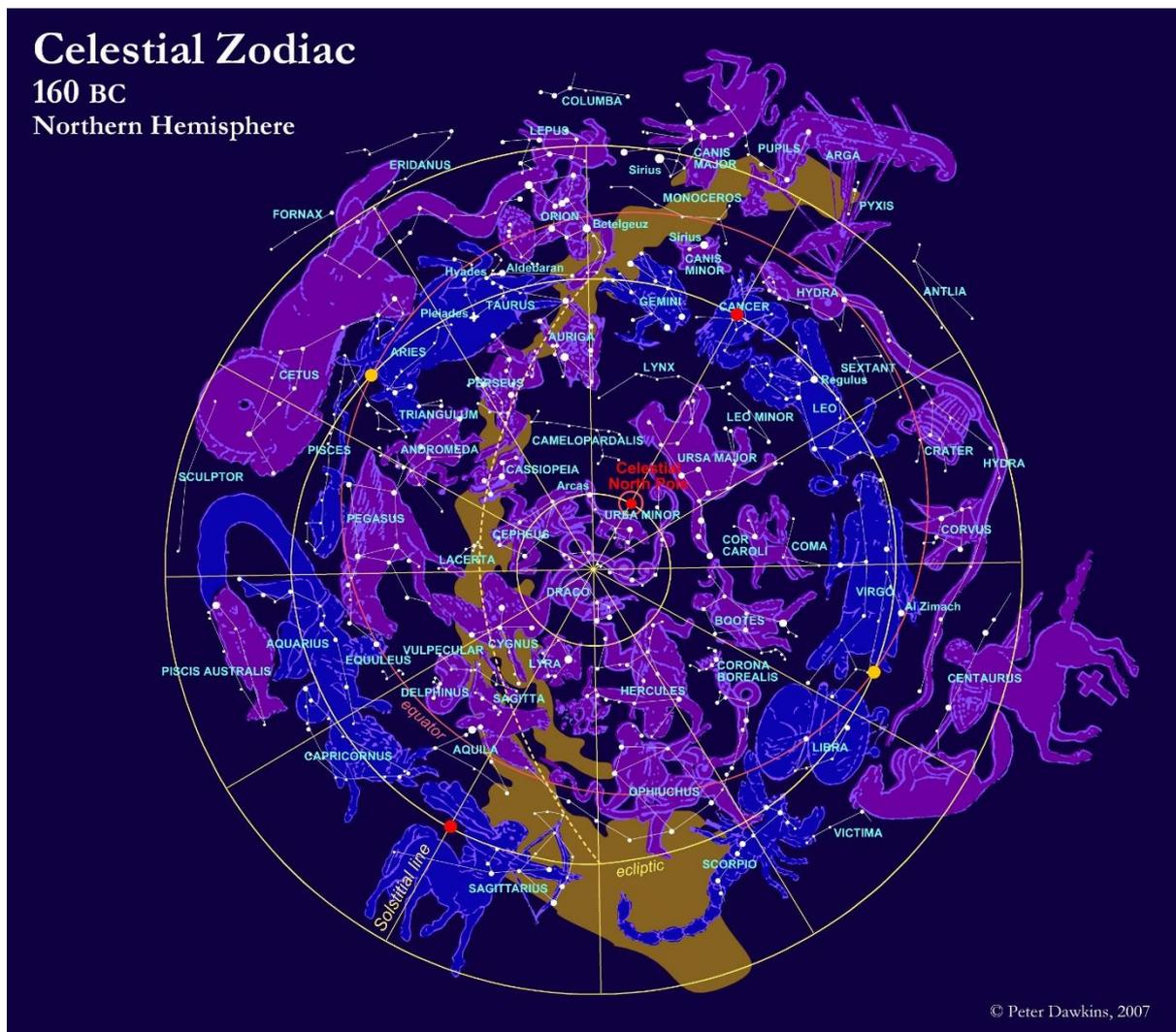


Figure 3: Ecliptic Celestial Zodiac 160 BC.

The north ecliptic pole (occult pole) in Draco is its centre. The ecliptic is shown as a yellow circle, the equator as a red circle. The zodiacal constellations along the ecliptic circle are coloured blue. The north celestial pole (the centre of the equatorial celestial zodiac) is marked with a red dot and encircled red. It is not marked by any star. The midsummer and midwinter suns (red dots on the ecliptic) are on the cusps of Cancer-Gemini and Capricorn-Sagittarius respectively. The vernal and autumnal equinox suns are in the signs Aries and Virgo respectively (in terms of the unequal-sign zodiac, they lie on the cusps of Aries-Pisces and Libra-Virgo).

Due to the Earth's axial precession, the north celestial pole and the equinoctial points gradually move around the north ecliptic pole and ecliptic at a rate of about one degree every 72 years. This means that, since the time of Hipparchus, the Point of Aries has shifted across the sky by about 30 degrees and is currently located within Pisces. In terms of the moving equatorial zodiac, its present location is near its border with Aquarius. However, exactly where it is now in terms of the fixed ecliptic zodiac can be seen in Figure 4.

Because Ages are defined by the 12 divisions or signs of the ecliptic zodiac, the equinoctial points can never accurately define which Age we are in. For this reason, the mystery schools use the solstice points as the markers. Figure 4 shows where the solstice Suns are now—i.e. the midsummer Sun on the cusp of Gemini-Taurus and the midwinter Sun on the cusp of Sagittarius-Scorpio. This marks the end of the last Great Age and the beginning of the new Great Age.

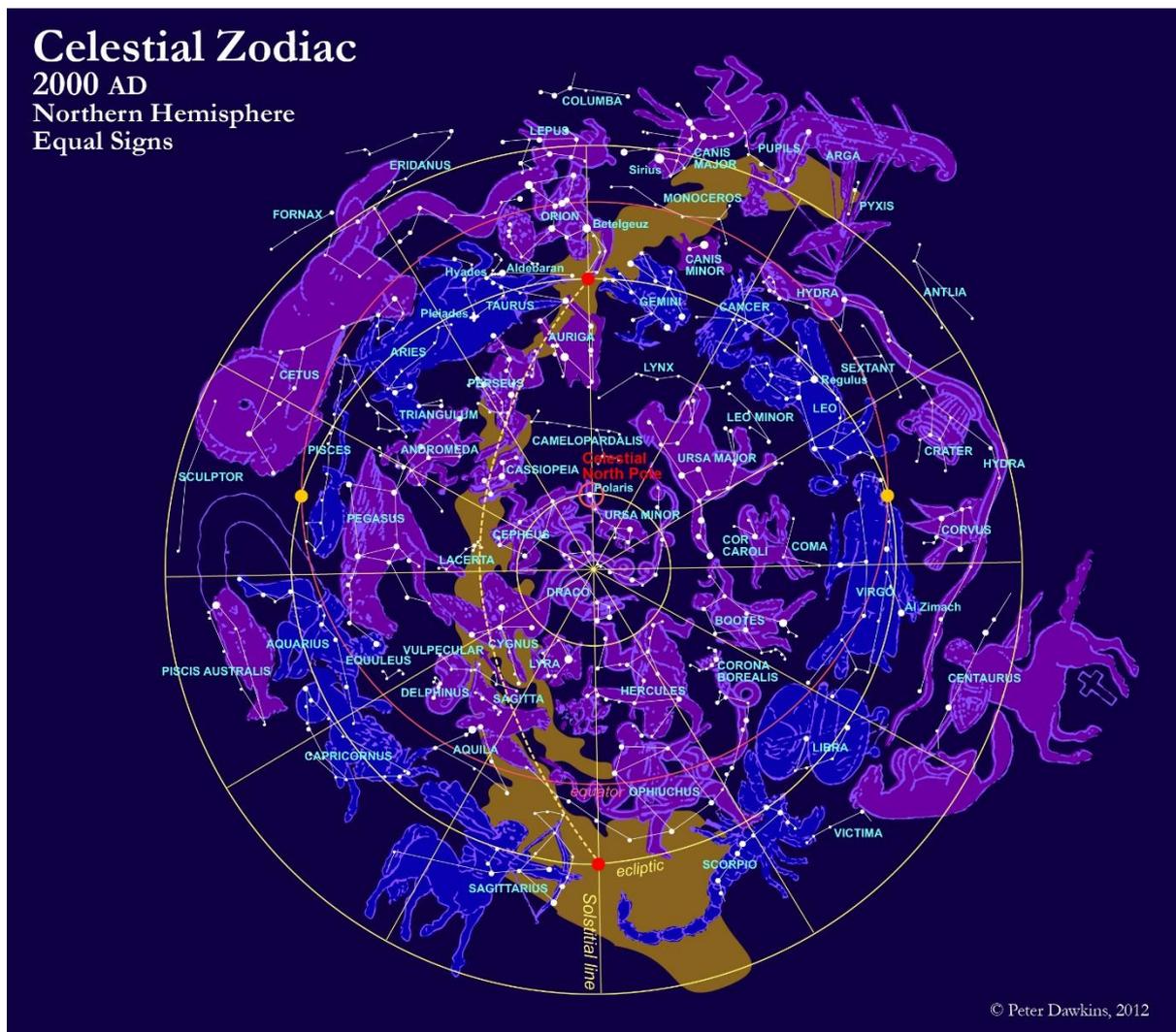


Figure 4: Ecliptic Celestial Zodiac 2000 AD.

The north ecliptic pole (occult pole) in Draco is its centre. The ecliptic is shown as a yellow circle, the equator as a red circle. The zodiacal constellations along the ecliptic circle are coloured blue. The north celestial pole (the centre of the equatorial celestial zodiac) is marked with a red dot and encircled red. It is marked by the star Arcas (Alpha Ursae Minoris), now known as Polaris. The midsummer and midwinter suns (red dots on the ecliptic) are on the AA cusps of Gemini-Taurus and Sagittarius-Scorpio respectively. The vernal and autumnal equinox suns are in the signs of Pisces and Leo respectively.

The midsummer Sun is now starting to move into the sign of Taurus, the Creator, and the midwinter Sun is starting to move into the sign of Scorpio, the Procreator. These two, which are polar opposite to each other, are associated with the divine Father and divine Mother respectively, symbolising that which creates and that which gives substance and form to the creation. In terms of the midsummer Sun, we are now about to enter the Age of Taurus, whilst in terms of the midwinter Sun we are now about to enter the Age of Scorpio.

The diameter between these two solstitial points at present coincides with the AA axis of the zodiac. The diameter at right-angles to it gives the occult or ideal equinoctial points that determine the name of the Age we are now entering from the equinoctial point of view—i.e. the Age of Aquarius (vernal equinox) and Age of Leo (autumnal equinox). This is an extra special time, enhanced by the fact that the four signs (Taurus, Scorpio, Aquarius, Leo) are the fixed signs of the zodiac—the ‘Master’ Cross of the zodiac. □