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In Shoshoni cosmology, the earth, while not regarded as spherical, had properties more compatible with modern observation than some popular pre-Columbian European explanations suggested.

To the Shoshoni the earth was a round disc which turned back and forth in a reciprocal motion that explained sunrise and sunset. A part of a layer-cake universe composed of three discs, the earth occupied space between a flat lower disc, or underworld. A long lost hole connected the two lower discs or earths. In the remote past an unusually bold explorer had descended through the connecting hole into the underworld. When he returned, he reported that the underworld disc reciprocated opposite to the earth so that during the earth's daytime, the underworld had nighttime, and vice versa. People of the underworld had the same culture as the Shoshoni, and their way of life was reinterpreted as Shoshoni culture changed. When the Shoshoni got horses, for example, inhabitants of the underworld got horses. Although the location of the connecting hole had been forgotten long ago, the Shoshoni had learned what they needed to know about the earth as a central layer in three discs.

Shoshoni astronomy identified constellations in patterns that differed from the Greek and Babylonian system accepted by the whites. For the Shoshoni, the handle of the Big Dipper (along with the connecting star in the dipper) was a rabbit net.

The two dipper stars pointing to Polaris were coyote's net. Polaris was recognized as an unmoving star, and Antares, the red star in Scorpio, was known simply as the red star. Most other names differed greatly from European versions: Orion's belt was

three mountain sheep husbands, and Sirius, the dog star in English, was crazy woman chasing.

As with most peoples, astronomical observation provided the Shoshoni with the basis for their calendar. They had twelve lunar months of thirty days each, taking up their year-end slack of five or six days in midwinter with a long month which they called the long month. Like the Greeks they did not bother with weeks, which are of Babylonian origin unrelated to natural phenomena. Shoshoni mathematics, limited greatly by absence of a written notation, were adequate for maintaining a calendar and for meeting most other Shoshoni needs. Operating on a base ten system, they could add, subtract, multiply, and divide. These arithmetic functions were accomplished through linguistic devices, and since they had numbers that went past a thousand (in a system that could be expanded indefinitely) they could handle most problems that they normally encountered. Actually, counting accurately beyond a thousand with no written notation is more of a strain than most Shoshoni (or any other people) care to undergo. When Donald Mackenzie asked their great leader, Peiem, how many Shoshoni people he had, Peiem (on account of limitations imposed by adequacy of Shoshoni census data and capability of Shoshoni mathematics) preferred to dodge the issue. When Mackenzie explained that he needed to provide this information to King George IV, Peiem reflected a moment and replied, "Tell him then that we are as numerous as the stars."

(This information has not been edited.)

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