Astronomical Coordinates

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Contents

Introduction

- Exploring the Universe $\rightarrow$ Need for a coordinate system
- But everything is moving $\rightarrow$ Complicated situation
  - Earth spins around its axis
  - Influence of Sun, Moon, Planets $\rightarrow$ Earth axis subjected to precession
  - Earth axis also subjected to nutation
  - Earth rotates around the Sun
  - Sun rotates around the center of our Galaxy
  - Our Galaxy moves through space within the local cluster
- What should we take as origin and orientation of the axes ?

  Use different coordinate systems depending on what one wants to observe
- Due to the movements we need also a time system

  Effects of the above movements are observed on very different timescales

  Use different time systems depending on what one wants to observe

  Not always practical (a lab with many clocks) $\rightarrow$ Overall time ?

Solar Time

- Elapsed time between two identical observed positions of the Sun
  Basis of our usual 24 hour day/night system
- Definition : 1 day = 24 hours 1 hour = 60 min. 1 minute = 60 sec.
  Time definition : 12:00h when the Sun is at the observer's meridian
- Different locations have different values of the Local Time (LT)
  Definition : Greenwich is defined as origin at the 0° meridian

$*$ Time rate varies (eccentricity of Earth's orbit and tilt of Earth's spin axis)

- Use the mean rate which averages out these effects $\rightarrow$ Mean Solar Time
- So at each location we have two times
  - Steady clock with noons 24 hours apart $\rightarrow$ Local Mean Time (LMT)
  - Actual position of the Sun $\rightarrow$ Local Apparent Time (LAT)
- The difference between LAT and LMT is called the Equation of Time

$*$ The reference is the Greenwich Time (GMT or GAT)

Sidereal Time

- Elapsed time between two identical observed positions of the same Star

  Closely related to Solar Time but not identical

- Observer outside the Solar system :

  The Earth spins around its axis in 1 "day"

  The Earth rotates around the Sun in n "days"

  After 1 Solar orbit the Earth has made 1 extra revolution around its spin axis

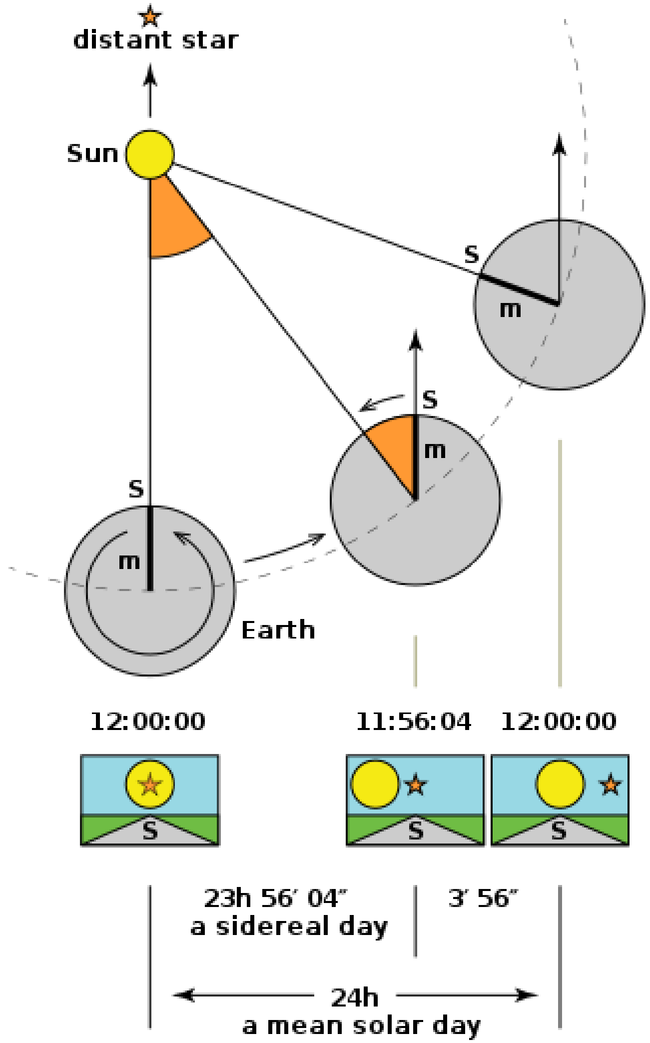
  $\rightarrow$ 1 sidereal day $= (1 - 1/n)$ solar day

- Consequently : 1 sidereal day = 23h 56m 04.09s (Mean Solar Time)

  Time definition : Related to the coord. of a Star at the observer's meridian

  - These coordinates will be explained later
  - These coord. vary due to precession and nutation of the Earth's spin axis

Sidereal time versus Solar time



Time systems

- Precession effect is stable and well known, nutation effect is more complex

  Precession period : 25770 years
- Use average epoch (50 years) coordinates to correct for the precession effect

  $\rightarrow$ Mean Sidereal Time
- So at each location we have two times
  - Local Mean Sidereal Time (LMST) (i.e. precession included, nutation not)
  - Local Apparent Sidereal Time (LAST) (incl. both precession and nutation)

$*$ The reference is the Greenwich Sidereal Time (GMST or GAST)

- This looks all fine, but what determines the value of the time intervals ?

  In other words : What counts the elapsed number of seconds ?

International Atomic Time (TAI)

- The absolute value of the second is defined by atomic transitions

  $^{133}_{55}$Cs has a very specific transition

  This transition happens very frequently and at a very stable rate

  1 atomic (SI) sec. $\equiv$ 9192631770 cycles of this $^{133}_{55}$Cs transition
- An individual Cs clock has a stability of the order of 10^{-14} per day

  Using a set of Cs clocks all over the world provides even better stability

$*$ Basis of TAI : Temps Atomique International

- TAI : Stable time system but not linked with astronomical phenomena

  TAI was introduced (= start epoch) 01-jan-1958 00:00:00 GAT

  $\rightarrow$ The reference for the absolute TAI time is Greenwich

  Earth's spin is irregular $\rightarrow$ Alternative for TAI needed

Coordinated Universal Time (UTC)

- **Astronomical time standard : UTC (Temps Universel Coordonné)**
  UTC transpires at the same rate as TAI → Clock ticks every SI second
  Average correction for the irregular Earth spin by introducing leap seconds

∗ **The leap second correction was introduced on 01-jan-1972 00:00:00 GAT**
This empirical correction is needed only every few years
See `https://hpiers.obspm.fr/iers/bul/bulc/Leap_Second.dat`

- **This implies : TAI-UTC=ΔAT   Currently (2020) ΔAT=37 sec.**

∗ **UTC is broadcast via various servers using a Network Time Protocol (NTP)**
See for instance `http://www.time.gov` **or** `http://www.time.gov/widget.html`

∗ **The reference for the absolute UTC time is Greenwich**
UTC is not updated for Daylight Saving Time (DST)

- **GPS timing was started at 06-jan-1980 00:00:00 UTC with ΔAT=19 sec.**
  GPS clocks tick at the same rate as TAI → GPS=TAI-19 sec. (fixed)

Time systems

Universal Time (UT1)

- Time corrected for the actual Earth spin is called Universal Time (UT1)

  This implies : UT1-UTC=ΔUT1

  See `https://hpiers.obspm.fr/iers/series/opa/eopc04` for daily updates

$*$ $|\Delta$UT1$|$ is kept < 0.9 sec. by introduction of leap seconds in UTC

Julian Date (JD)

- Comparison of observations over many years is quite cumbersome
  - Varying number of days in a year (leap years) and in various months
  - The absolute time indication is position dependent
- A continuous day counting system has been introduced called Julian Dates

  Origin JD=0 has been defined as 01-jan-4713 BC at 12:00:00 Greenwich

  Each Julian day has exactly 86400 seconds (No leap seconds)

  Each Julian century has 36525 days $\rightarrow$ Each Julian year has 365.25 days
- Example : 02-jan-2000 12:00:00 UT corresponds to JD=2451546.0

Coordinate systems

- Celestial positions : Convenient to use spherical coordinates (r, θ, ϕ)

  In indicating a direction, the distance doesn't matter $\rightarrow$ Ignore r
- Celestial positions are indicated by two angles called latitude and longitude

  But w.r.t. to which origin are these angles provided ?

∗ Define an equator by taking a so called great circle

  Great circle : Centered at the sphere center and encompasses the full sphere
- The equator indicates the zero of latitude

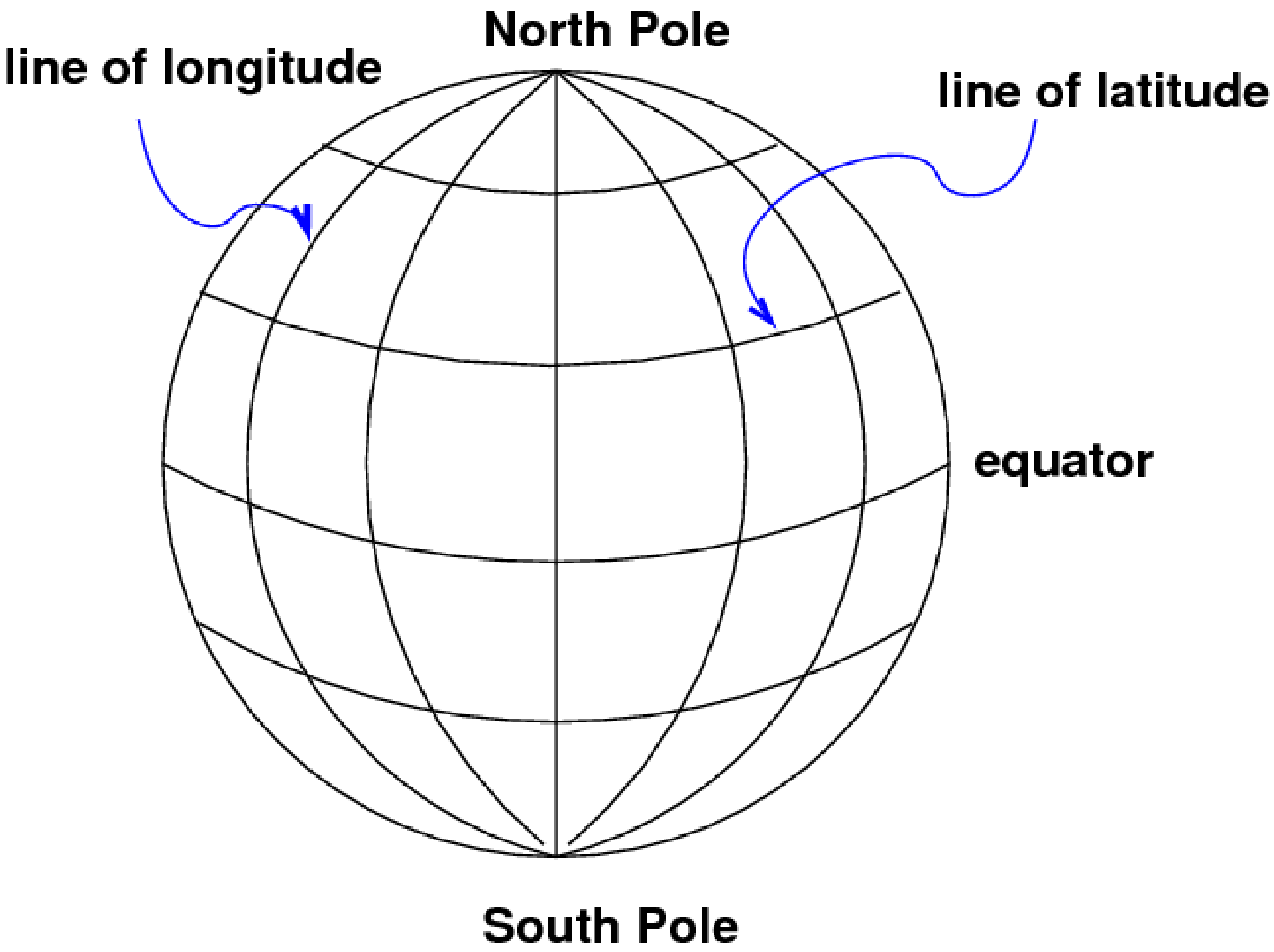
∗ Choose a location on the equator as zero for the longitude

  Define the directions of positive and negative latitude and longitude

  The lines of constant longitude are called meridians
- Reference systems like this are called celestial reference systems

  It is obvious that there are many different possibilities for such a system

A generic celestial reference system



Coordinate systems

Horizon coordinates

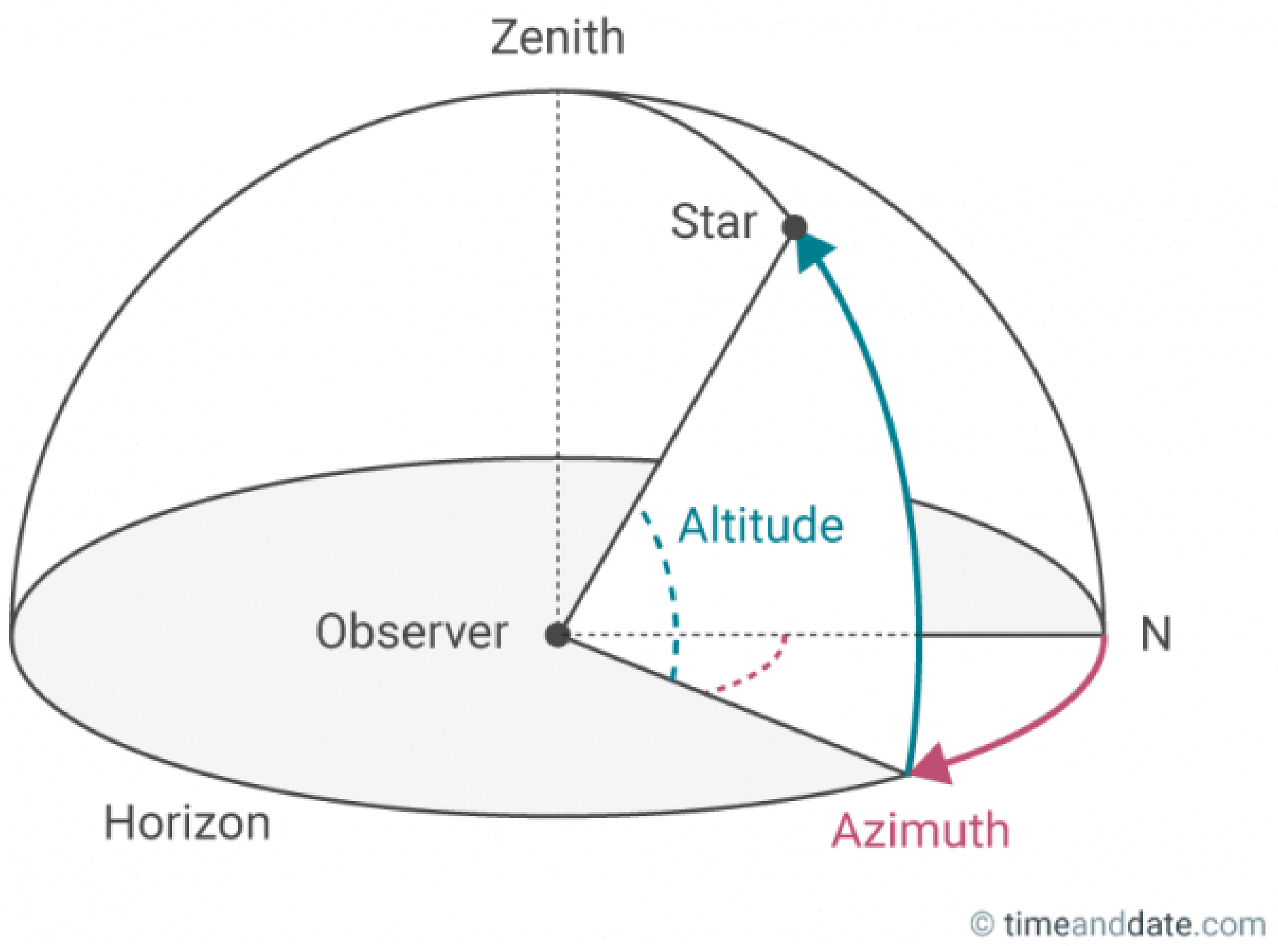
- Imagine standing at night in an open field without any houses, trees etc.
  You feel as if you are the centre of everything
- Conventions to define the observer centered reference system
  The point straight above is called Zenith and straight below is called Nadir

∗ Take the horizon as equator
  The (latitude) angle above the horizon of a star's position is called Altitude
  Alternatively the angle w.r.t. the Zenith (Zenith angle) of a star can be given

∗ Take the North point on the equator as zero longitude
  The (longitude) angle measured eastwards to a star's position is called Azimuth

∗ Notes :
  For an observer at a Pole, Greenwich defines the zero longitude
  Values of altitude and azimuth depend on the location of the observer
  Values of altitude and azimuth change fast due to the Earth's spin

The horizon coordinate system



Equatorial coordinates

- Imagine standing on one of the Poles at the Earth's spin axis
  With time the azimuth of a star will change, but not its altitude
  This is quite convenient if one wants to follow a certain object

$*$ Due to the coincidence of the Zenith-Nadir axis with the Earth's spin axis
  $\rightarrow$ Your equator coincides with the Earth's equator

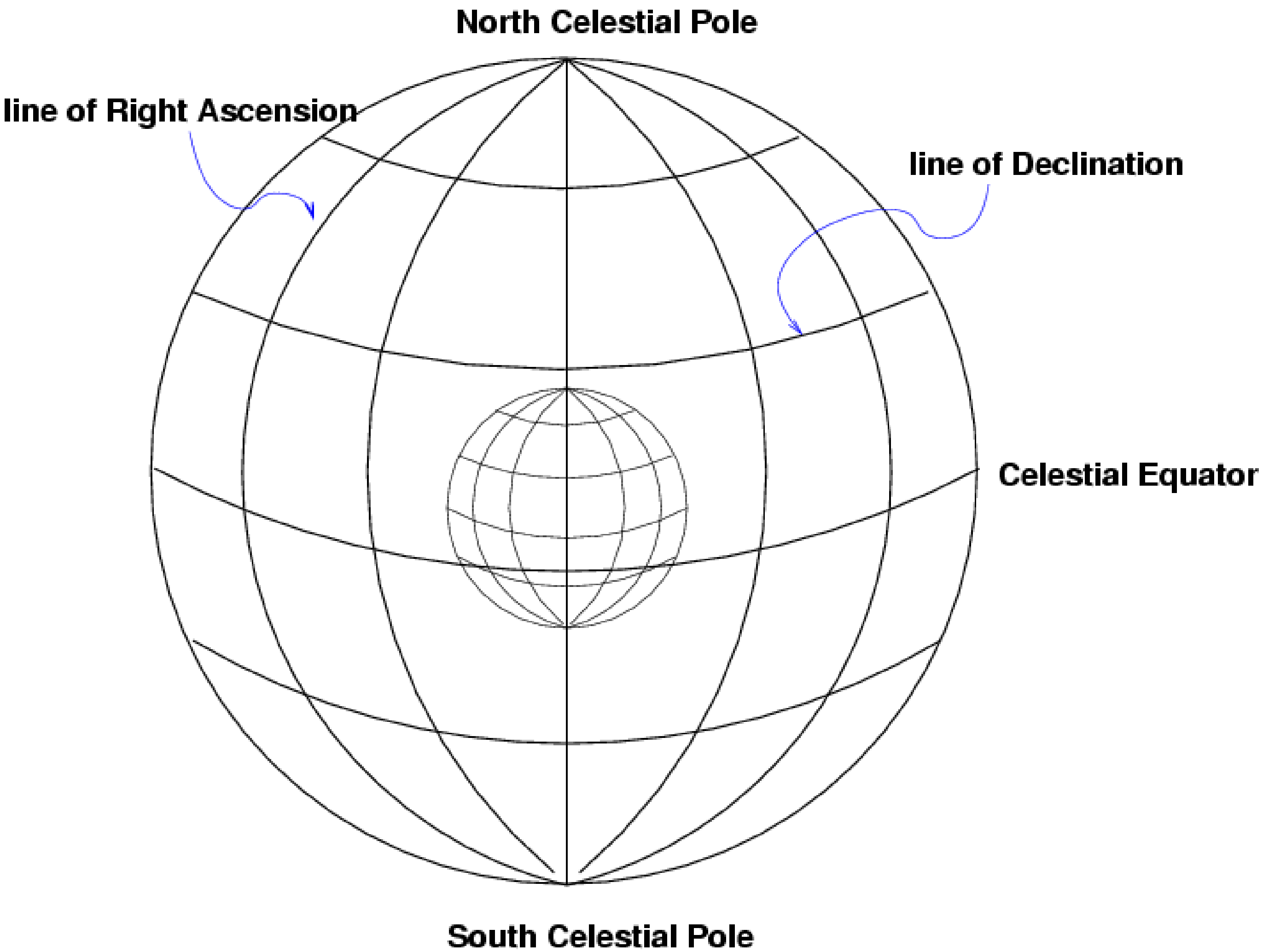
- Conventions to define the equatorial celestial reference system

$*$ Take the center of the Earth as the center of the reference system

$*$ Take the (projection of) the Earth equator as equator
  This projection is called the celestial equator
  The angle above the equator of a star's position is called Declination
  The angle of longitude is called Right Ascension

- What to take as zero longitude ?
  Preferably a point that doesn't change with time.

The equatorial celestial reference system

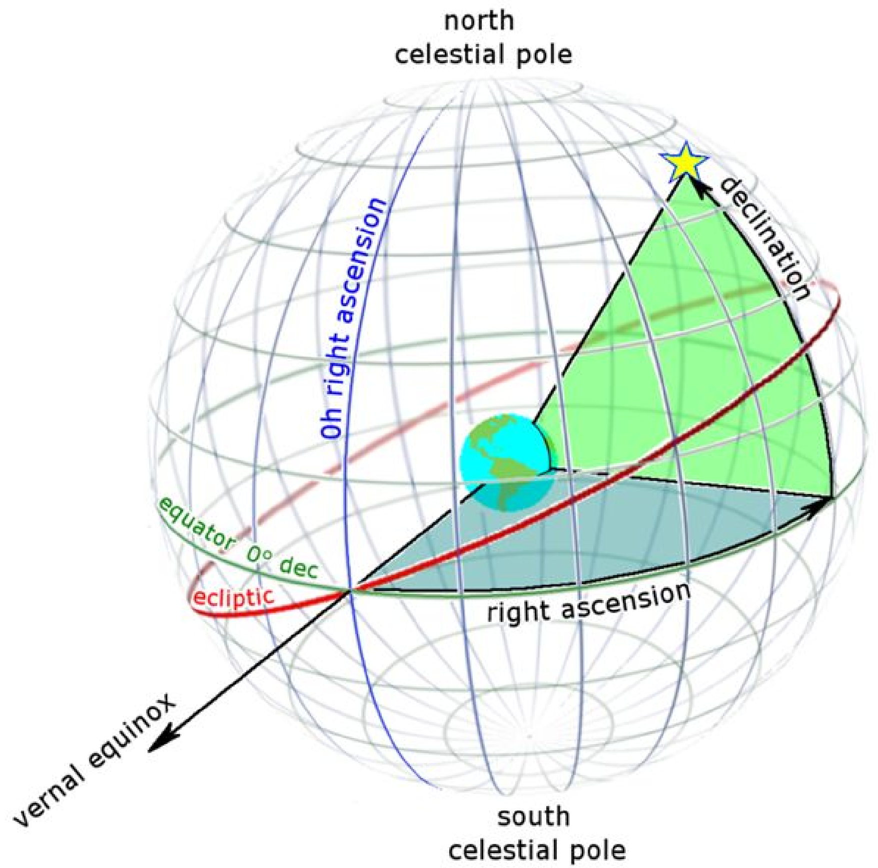


Coordinate systems

- The Earth rotates around the Sun in a fixed plane
  The Earth's spin axis is inclined ($\sim 23.4^\circ$) with the normal to this plane
- Imagine that the Earth only rotates around the Sun; no spin around its axis
  Consider the Earth as a perfect sphere
  Observe from the Earth's center the position of the Sun over the year
  Project the Sun's trajectory on the Earth's surface
  $\rightarrow$ This projection is a great circle inclined ($\sim 23.4^\circ$) with the equator
  This projection of the Sun's trajectory is called the ecliptic
- The ecliptic will cross the equator twice per year
  Going from South to North in spring $\rightarrow$ Vernal equinox
  Going from North to South in autumn $\rightarrow$ Autumn equinox

$*$ Take the Vernal equinox on the equator as zero longitude
  The angle measured eastwards to a star's position is called Right Ascension

The equatorial coordinate system



Coordinate systems

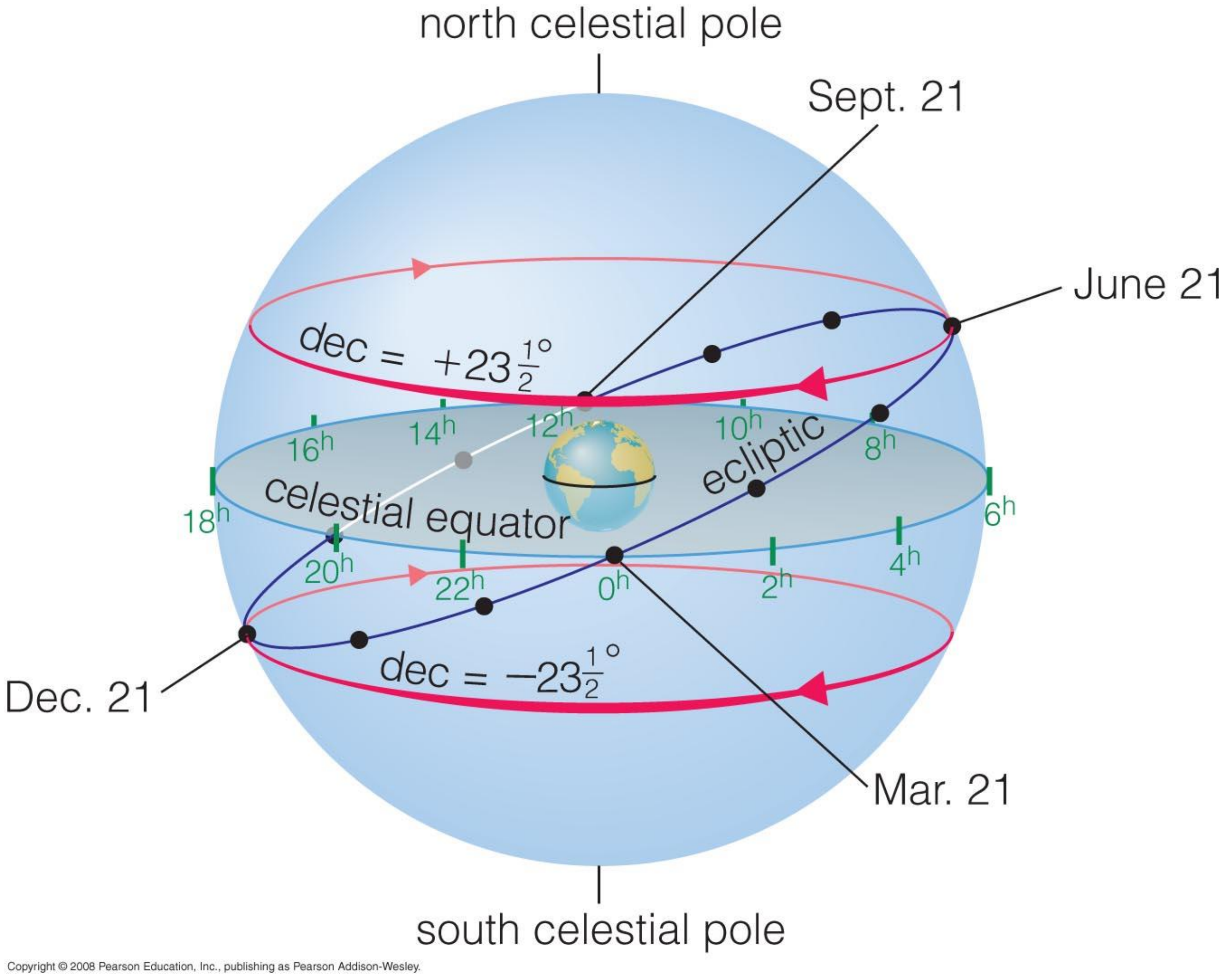
- Precession of the Earth's spin axis $\rightarrow$ Vernal equinox shifts along the equator
  One full turn (360°) in 25770 years $\rightarrow$ Quite a stable point
  Once every 50 years (epoch) the Vernal equinox position is updated
- The nutation of the Earth's spin axis induces also (minor) shifts in declinations

Notation conventions

- Declination (δ) is indicated in degrees (North $+$, South $-$)
- Right Ascension (α) is indicated in hours, minutes, seconds
  1 Full revolution (360°) in 24 hours $\rightarrow$ 1 hour $= 15^\circ$
- The average epoch coordinates we call Mean coordinates
  The Mean (α, δ) contain the precession correction, but not the nutation
- Including also the nutation correction we speak of True coordinates

$*$ So it is important to denote w.r.t. to which epoch origin the (α, δ) are given
  Nowadays we use the update at the start of the year 2000 (i.e. J2000)

Equatorial coordinate notations



Coordinate systems

Indicating directions in the Universe

- We have seen that (α, δ) provide rather constant coordinates
  Use these to indicate a certain direction in the Universe
- Convert track directions (θ, ϕ) in IceCube to (α, δ)
  $\rightarrow$ Enables us to look for cosmic neutrino sources

Sidereal Time

- As the Earth spins around its axis, different stars will cross a certain meridian

$*$ Sidereal Time $\equiv \alpha$ of the stars that cross the observer's meridian

- Since we can use the Mean and True coordinates we define
  LMST : Local Mean Sidereal Time
  LAST : Local Apparent Sidereal Time
  GMST : Greenwich Mean Sidereal Time
  GAST : Greenwich Apparent Sidereal Time