

## The *Popol Vuh*: Background

[665] Like other holy texts, the *Popol Vuh*, the holy text of the Maya, is a reflection of cultural beliefs. Containing several creation stories and tales of the epic hero, the work reveals the society's polytheistic religious position along with its views of death and the afterlife. Additionally, the work vicariously reveals the Maya's history before and after the arrival of the Europeans. In the end, this is a work full of historical and anthropological information.

Before studying the mythical or literary value of such a work, one must consider how the *Popol Vuh* came to the attention of contemporary readers. The stories told in the *Popol Vuh* were passed orally from generation to generation and later transcribed in the Quiché language of the Maya. Subsequently, these works were translated by Spanish clerics. However, some of these translations raise certain issues of authenticity. With a translation one must first trust the translator, that he/she is actually capable of performing the task without error. The translator must exhibit a credible understanding of the indigenous language and culture. This type of language acquisition requires more translating time and knowledge than the Spanish translators of this text had. In addition to the issue of competence, one must be assured that the translator will be objective. What is known is that the Spanish desired to convert the native population to Catholicism. In attempting to do so, they destroyed many of the other Mayan holy texts because the Catholic friars considered them texts of the devil. This destruction reflects an obvious Eurocentrism. In the end, then, the modern reader cannot be certain whether similarities between *Popol Vuh* and the Bible are to be attributed to Jung's collective unconscious or to a corrupt Spanish translation.

These translation issues aside, the text still reveals a great deal of anthropological information, rich in revelation about the Maya. The subtle yet powerful anthropological information seems to be such that either the translators did not realize it was present, or they did not find it offensive, and therefore permitted it to remain in the text. The reader witnesses by means of the *Popol Vuh* a highly-developed civilization governed by religious and social laws and steeped in a vibrant historical tradition. The multiple creation stories probably reflect a society tolerant of diversity and change. Moreover, multiple creation stories allow Mayan gods to be more human and less perfect, presenting standards of conduct not too exalted for humans to attain. In societies in which the god structure or religious standard is too high, the people are doomed to destruction in some form or another. By permitting the gods to be imperfect, the people are allowed to make mistakes and still reap the rewards of the afterlife.

More than anthropological information, the different creation stories can be taken as sign posts in Mayan history. Mayan history is divided into three eras, moving from the most archaic to the most sophisticated, and the creation stories seem to replicate this sequence. In these tales, the gods use progressively more sophisticated means of producing various generations of human kind. The final version of humans emerges as close to perfection as the gods will make them; however, the *Popol Vuh* stresses that individuals are never perfected, but rather, they are left to evolve into what they must become.

Within this holy text is an immaculate-conception story somewhat similar to that of the Christian story. The newborn child has supernatural abilities and becomes an epic hero. He becomes a savior for his mother when his grandfather suspects her of acting dishonorably and orders her death. He convinces the servants, who are to kill his mother, of her innocence and together they work to free her.

The gods frequently embody values and concepts important to the community. As with the Greeks, Egyptians, or Mesopotamians, the gods represent forces of nature, and the *Popol Vuh* elucidates the mysterious dimensions of these forces. Mayan gods are limited not only by conditions in the physical world but also by the processes of death. The *Popol Vuh* allows the reader to infer that death is not the end but [666] that it can be conquered. The very title of one of the episodes, “Victory over the Underworld,” allows the reader to understand a notion of the Mayan people: that if the society follows its spiritual leaders, overcoming death is possible. In this portion of the story, also, one cannot help noticing the similarity to many of the other epic heroes who descend into the underworld, where they are tested, prove their worthiness, and return with the boon of knowledge for the people.

The reader also learns of the Mayan thoughts about the origin of man, how and why he came to be. The reader sees the organic connection that the Mayans have with their past. One sees how man came to be and how he was made from corn—an extremely important and symbolic crop for the Mayan peoples. The work ends with a logically-sequenced prayer for future generations. The *Popol Vuh* suggests that only by delving into the past does one understand the present and that in understanding the present, prayers must be offered for the future. Thus, for the Mayas, life is cyclical, continuous, and serious.

## **Selected Bibliography**

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# Mayan



## Popol Vuh<sup>1</sup>

*From Part I*  
*[Prologue, Creation]*

[667] This is the beginning of the Ancient Word, here in this place called Quiché. Here we shall inscribe, we shall implant the Ancient Word, the potential and source for everything done in the citadel of Quiché, in the nation of Quiché people.

And here we shall take up the demonstration, revelation, and account of how things were put in shadow and brought to light

by the Maker, Modeler, named Bearer, Begetter  
Hunahpu Possum, Hunahpu Coyote,  
Great White Peccary, Tapir,  
Sovereign Plumed Serpent,  
Heart of the Lake, Heart of the Sea,  
Maker of the Blue-Green Plate,  
Maker of the Blue-Green Bowl,<sup>2</sup>

as they are called, also named, also described as

the midwife, matchmaker  
named Xpiyacoc, Xmucane,  
defender, protector,<sup>3</sup>  
twice a midwife, twice a matchmaker,

as is said in the words of Quiché. They accounted for everything—and did it too—as enlightened beings, in enlightened words. We shall write about this now amid the preaching of God, in Christendom now. We shall bring it out because there is no longer a place to see it, a Council Book,

a place to see “The Light That Came from  
Across the Sea,”  
the account of “Our Place in the Shadows,”  
a place to see “The Dawn of Life,”

as it is called. There is the original book and ancient writing, but he who reads and ponders it hides his face.<sup>4</sup> It takes a long performance and account to complete the emergence of all the sky-earth:

the fourfold siding, fourfold cornering  
measuring, fourfold staking,

halving die cord, stretching the cord  
in the sky, on the earth,  
the four sides, the four corners,<sup>5</sup>  
by the Maker, Modeler,  
mother-father of life, of humankind,  
giver of breath, giver of heart,  
bearer, upbringer in the light that lasts  
of those born in the light, begotten in the light;  
worrier, knower of everything, whatever there is:  
sky-earth, lake-sea.

[668] This is the account, here it is:

Now it still ripples, now it still murmurs, ripples, it still sighs, still hums, and it is empty under the sky.

Here follow the first words, the first eloquence:

There is not yet one person, one animal, bird, fish, crab, tree, rock, hollow, canyon, meadow, forest. Only the sky alone is there; the face of the earth is not clear. Only the sea alone is pooled under all the sky; there is nothing whatever gathered together. It is at rest; not a single thing stirs. It is held back, kept at rest under the sky.

Whatever there is that might be is simply not there: only the pooled water, only the calm sea, only it alone is pooled.

Whatever might be is simply not there: only murmurs, ripples, in the dark, in the night. Only the Maker, Modeler alone, Sovereign Plumed Serpent the Bearers, Begetters are in the water, a glittering light. They are there, they are enclosed in quetzal feathers, in blue-green.

Thus the name, "Plumed Serpent." They are great knowers, great thinkers in their very being.

And of course there is the sky, and there is also the Heart of Sky. This is the name of the god, as it is spoken.

And then came his word, he came here to the Sovereign Plumed Serpent, here in the blackness, in the early dawn. He spoke with the Sovereign Plumed Serpent, and they talked, then they thought, then they worried. They agreed with each other, they joined their words, their thoughts. Then it was clear, then they reached accord in the light, and then humanity was clear, when they conceived the growth, the generation of trees, of bushes, and the growth of life, of humankind, in the blackness, in the early dawn, all because of the Heart of Sky, named Hurricane. Thunderbolt Hurricane comes first, the second is Newborn Thunderbolt, and the third is Raw Thunderbolt.<sup>6</sup>

So there were three of them, as Heart of Sky, who came to the Sovereign Plumed Serpent, when the dawn of life was conceived:

"How should it be sown, how should it dawn? Who is to be the provider, nurturer?"<sup>7</sup>

"Let it be this way, think about it, this water should be removed, emptied out for the formation of the earth's own plate and platform, then comes the sowing, the dawning of the sky-earth. But there will be no high days and no bright praise for our work, our design, until the rise of the human work the human design," they said.

And then the earth arose because of them, it was simply their word that brought it forth. For the forming of the earth they said "Earth." It arose suddenly, just like a cloud, like a mist, now forming, unfolding. Then the mountains were separated from the water, all at once the great

mountains came forth. By their genius alone, by their cutting edge<sup>8</sup> alone they carried out the conception of the mountain-plain, whose face grew instant groves of cypress and pine.

And the Plumed Serpent was pleased with this:

“It was good that you came, Heart of Sky, Hurricane, and Newborn Thunderbolt, Raw Thunderbolt. Our work, our design will turn out well,” they said.

And the earth was formed first, the mountain-plain. The channels of water were separated; their branches wound their ways among the mountains. The waters were divided when the great mountains appeared.

Such was the formation of the earth when it was brought forth by the Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth, as they are called, since they were the first to think of it. The sky was set apart, and the earth was set apart in the midst of the waters.

Such was their plan when they thought, when they worried about the completion of their work.<sup>9</sup>



*From Part 2  
[The Twins Defeat Seven Macaw]*

Here is the beginning of the defeat and destruction of The day of Seven Macaw by the two boys, the first named Hunahpu and the second named Xbalanque.<sup>1</sup> Being gods, the two of them saw evil in his attempt at selfmagnification before the Heart of Sky.

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**[669]** This is the great tree of Seven Macaw, a nance,<sup>2</sup> and this is the food of Seven Macaw. In order to eat the fruit of the nance he goes up the tree every day. Since Hunahpu and Xbalanque have seen where he feeds, they are now hiding beneath the tree of Seven Macaw, they are keeping quiet here, the two boys are in the leaves of the tree.

And when Seven Macaw arrived, perching over his meal, the nance, it was then that he was shot by Hunahpu. The blowgun shot went right to his jaw, breaking his mouth, Then he went up over the tree and fell flat on the ground. Suddenly Hunahpu appeared, running. He set out to grab him, but actually it was the arm of Hunahpu that was seized by Seven Macaw. He yanked it straight back, he bent it back at the shoulder. Then Seven Macaw tore it right out of Hunahpu. Even so, the boys did well: the first round was not their defeat by Seven Macaw.

And when Seven Macaw had taken the arm of Hunahpu, he went home. Holding his jaw very carefully, he arrived:

“What have you got there?” said Chimalmat, the wife of Seven Macaw.

“What is it but those two tricksters! They’ve shot me, they’ve dislocated my jaw.<sup>3</sup> All my teeth are just loose, now they ache. But once what I’ve got is over the fire—hanging there, dangling over the fire—then they can just come and get it. They’re real tricksters!” said Seven Macaw, then he hung up the arm of Hunahpu.

Meanwhile Hunahpu and Xbalanque were thinking. And then they invoked a grandfather, a truly white-haired grandfather, and a grandmother, a truly humble grandmother—just bent-over, elderly people. Great White Peccary is the name of the grandfather, and Great White Tapir is the name of the grandmother.<sup>4</sup> The boys said to the grandmother and grandfather:

“Please travel with us when we go to get our arm from Seven Macaw; we’ll just follow right behind you. You’ll tell him:

‘Do forgive us our grandchildren, who travel with us. Their mother and father are dead, and so they follow along there, behind us. Perhaps we should give them away, since all we do is pull worms out of teeth.’ So we’ll seem like children to Seven Macaw, even though we’re giving you the instructions,” the two boys told them.

“Very well,” they replied.

After that they approached the place where Seven Macaw was in front of his home. When the grandmother and grandfather passed by, the two boys were romping along behind them. When they passed below the lord’s house, Seven Macaw was yelling his mouth off because of his teeth. And when Seven Macaw saw the grandfather and grandmother traveling with them:

“Where are you headed, our grandfather?” said the lord.

“We’re just making our living, your lordship,” they replied.

“Why are you working for a living? Aren’t those your children traveling with you?”

“No, they’re not, your lordship. They’re our grandchildren, our descendants, but it is nevertheless we who take pity on them. The bit of food they get is the portion we give them, your lordship,” replied the grandmother and grandfather. Since the lord is getting done in by the pain in his teeth, it is only with great effort that he speaks again:

“I implore you, please take pity on me! What sweets can you make, what poisons<sup>5</sup> can you cure? said the lord.

“We just pull the worms out of teeth, and we just cure eyes. We just set bones, your lordship,” they replied.

“Very well, please cure my teeth. They really ache, every day. It’s insufferable! I get no sleep because of them—and my eyes. They just shot me, those two tricksters! Ever since it started I haven’t eaten because of it. Therefore take pity on me! Perhaps it’s because my teeth are loose now.”

“Very well, your lordship. It’s a worm, gnawing at the bone.<sup>6</sup> It’s merely a matter of putting in a replacement and taking the teeth out, sir.”

“But perhaps it’s not good for my teeth to come out—since I am, after all, a lord. My finery is in my teeth—and my eyes.”

“But then we’ll put in a replacement. Ground bone will be put back in.” And this is the “ground bone”: it’s only white corn.

“Very well. Yank them out! Give me some help here!” he replied.

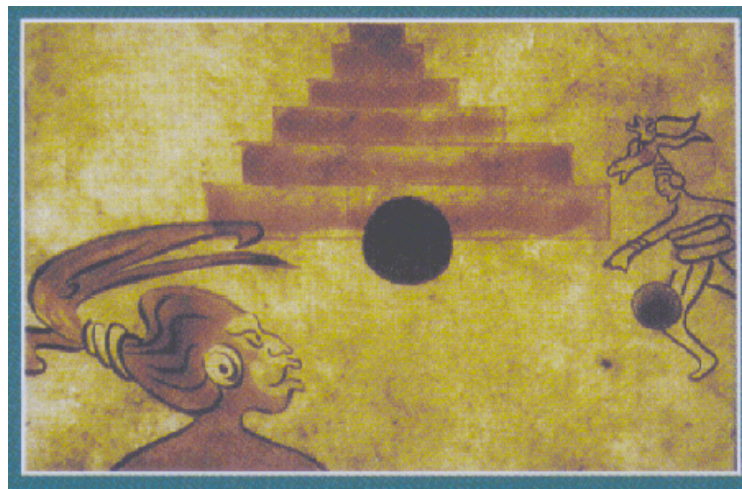
**[670]** And when the teeth of Seven Macaw came out, it was only white corn that went in as a replacement for his teeth—just a coating shining white, that corn in his mouth. His face fell at once, he no longer looked like a lord. The last of his teeth came out, the jewels that had stood out blue from his mouth.

And then the eyes of Seven Macaw were cured. When his eyes were trimmed back the last of his metal came out.<sup>7</sup> Still he felt no pain; he just looked on while the last of his greatness left him. It was just as Hunahpu and Xbalanque had intended.

And when Seven Macaw died, Hunahpu got back his arm. And Chimalmat, the wife of Seven Macaw, also died.

Such was the loss of the riches of Seven Macaw: only the doctors got the jewels and gems that had made him arrogant, here on the face of the earth. The genius of the grandmother, the genius of the grandfather did its work when they took back their arm: it was implanted and the break got well again. Just as they had wished the death of Seven Macaw, so they brought it about. They had seen evil in his self-magnification.

After this the two boys went on again. What they did was simply the word of the Heart of Sky.



*From Part 3  
[Victory over the Underworld]*

And now we shall name the name of the father of Hunahpu and Xbalanque. Let's drink to him, and let's just drink to the telling and accounting of the begetting of Hunahpu and Xbalanque. We shall tell just half of it, just a part of the account of their father. Here follows the account. These are the names: One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu,<sup>8</sup> as they are called.

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And One and Seven Hunahpu went inside Dark House.<sup>9</sup> And then their torch was brought, only one torch, already lit, sent by One and Seven Death, along with a cigar for each of them, also already lit, sent by the lords. When these were brought to One and Seven Hunahpu they were cowering, here in the dark. When the bearer of their torch and cigars arrived, the torch was bright as it entered; their torch and both of their cigars were burning. The bearer spoke:

"They must be sure to return them in the morning—not finished, but just as they look now. They must return them intact,' the lords say to you," they were told, and they were defeated. They finished the torch and they finished the cigars that had been brought to them.

And Xibalba is packed with tests, heaps and piles of tests.

This is the first one: the Dark House, with darkness alone inside.

And the second is named Rattling House, heavy with cold inside, whistling with drafts, clattering with hail. A deep chill comes inside here.

And the third is named Jaguar House, with jaguars alone inside, jostling one another, crowding together, with gnashing teeth. They're scratching around; these jaguars are shut inside the house.

Bat House is the name of the fourth test, with bats alone inside the house, squeaking, shrieking, darting through the house. The bats are shut inside; they can't get out.

And the fifth is named Razor House, with blades alone inside. The blades are moving back and forth, ripping, slashing through the house.

These are the first tests of Xibalba, but One and Seven Hunahpu never entered into them, except for the one named earlier, the specified test house.

And when One and Seven Hunahpu went back before One and Seven Death, they were asked:

"Where are my cigars? What of my torch? They were brought to you last night!"

"We finished them, your lordship."

"Very well. This very day, your day is finished, you will die, you will disappear, and we shall break you off. Here you will hide your faces: you are to be sacrificed!" said One and Seven Death.

And then they were sacrificed and buried. They were buried at the Place of Ball Game Sacrifice,<sup>1</sup> as it is called. The head of One Hunahpu was cut off; only his body was buried with his younger brother.

"Put his head in the fork of the tree that stands by the road," said One and Seven Death. And when his head was put in the fork of the tree, the tree bore fruit. It would not have had any fruit, had not the head of One Hunahpu been put in the fork of the tree.

[671] This is the calabash tree, as we call it today, or "the head of One Hunahpu," as it is said.

And then One and Seven Death were amazed at the fruit of the tree. The fruit grows out everywhere, and it isn't clear where the head of One Hunahpu is; now it looks just the way the calabashes look. All the Xibalbans see this, when they come to look.

The state of the tree loomed large in their thoughts, because it came about at the same time the head of One Hunahpu was put in the fork. The Xibalbans said among themselves:

"No one is to pick the fruit, nor is anyone to go beneath the tree," they said. They restricted themselves; all of Xibalba held back.

It isn't clear which is the head of One Hunahpu; now it's exactly the same as the fruit of the tree. Calabash tree came to be its name, and much was said about it. A maiden heard about it, and here we shall tell of her arrival.

And here is the account of a maiden, the daughter of a lord named Blood Gatherer.<sup>2</sup>

And this is when a maiden heard of it, the daughter of a lord. Blood Gatherer is the name of her father, and Blood Woman is the name of the maiden.

And when he heard the account of the fruit of the tree, her father retold it. And she was amazed at the account:

"I'm not acquainted with that tree they talk about. "Its fruit is truly sweet!" they say, 'I hear," she said.

Next, she went all alone and arrived where the tree stood. It stood at the Place of Ball Game Sacrifice:

"What? Well! What's the fruit of this tree? Shouldn't this tree bear something sweet? They shouldn't die, they shouldn't be wasted. Should I pick one?" said the maiden.

And then the bone spoke; it was here in the fork of the tree:



“Why do you want a mere bone, a round thing in the branches of a tree?” said the head of One Hunahpu when it spoke to the maiden. “You don’t want it,” he was told.

“I do want it,” said the maiden.

“Very well. Stretch out your right hand here, so I can see it,” said the bone.

“Yes,” said the maiden. She stretched out her right hand, up there in front of the bone.

And then the bone spit out its saliva, which landed squarely in the hand of the maiden.

And then she looked in her hand, she inspected it right away, but the bone’s saliva wasn’t in her hand.

“It is just a sign I have given you, my saliva, my spittle. This, my head, has nothing on it—just bone, nothing of meat. It’s just the same with the head of a great lord: it’s just the flesh that makes his face look good. And when he dies, people get frightened by his bones. After that, his son is like his saliva, his spittle, in his being, whether it be the son of a lord or the son of a craftsman, an orator. The father does not disappear, but goes on being fulfilled. Neither dimmed nor destroyed is the face of a lord, a warrior, craftsman, orator. Rather, he will leave his daughters and sons. So it is that I have done likewise through you. Now go up there on the face of the earth; you will not die. Keep the word. So be it,” said the head of One and Seven Hunahpu—they were of one mind when they did it.

This was the word Hurricane, Newborn Thunderbolt, Raw Thunderbolt had given them. In the same way, by the time the maiden returned to her home, she had been given many instructions. Right away something was generated in her belly, from the saliva alone, and this was the generation of Hunahpu and Xbalanque.

And when the maiden got home and six months had passed, she was found out by her father. Blood Gatherer is the name of her father.

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And they came to the lords.<sup>3</sup> Feigning great humility, they bowed their heads all the way to the ground when they arrived. They brought themselves low, doubled over, flattened out, down to the rags, to the tatters. They really looked like vagabonds when they arrived.

So then they were asked what their mountain<sup>4</sup> and tribe were, and they were also asked about their mother and father:

“Where do you come from?” they were asked.

“We’ve never known, lord. We don’t know the identity of our mother and father. We must’ve been small when they died,” was all they said. They didn’t give any names.

“Very well. Please entertain us, then. What do you want us to give you in payment?” they were asked.

[672] “Well, we don’t want anything. To tell the truth, we’re afraid,” they told the lord.

“Don’t be afraid. Don’t be ashamed. Just dance this way: first you’ll dance to sacrifice yourselves, you’ll set fire to my house after that, you’ll act out all the things you know. We want to be entertained. This is our heart’s desire, the reason you had to be sent for, dear vagabonds. We’ll give you payment,” they were told.

So then they began their songs and dances, and then all the Xibalbans arrived, the spectators crowded the floor, and they danced everything: they danced the Weasel, they danced the Poorwill,<sup>5</sup> they danced the Armadillo. Then the lord said to them:

“Sacrifice my dog, then bring him back to life again,” they were told.

“Yes,” they said.

When they sacrificed the dog  
he then came back to life.  
And that dog was really happy  
when he came back to life.  
Back and forth he wagged his tail  
when he came back to life.

And the lord said to them:

“Well, you have yet to set my home on fire,” they were told next, so then they set fire to the home of the lord. The house was packed with all the lords, but they were not burned. They quickly fixed it back again, lest the house of One Death be consumed all at once, and all the lords were amazed, and they went on dancing this way. They were overjoyed.

And then they were asked by the lord:

“You have yet to kill a person! Make a sacrifice without death!” they were told.

“Very well,” they said.

And then they took hold of a human sacrifice. And they held up a human heart on high. And they showed its roundness to the lords.

And now One and Seven Death admired it, and now that person was brought right back to life. His heart was overjoyed when he came back to life, and the lords were amazed:

“Sacrifice yet again, even do it to yourselves! Let’s see it! At heart, that’s the dance we really want from you,” the lords said now.

“Very well, lord, they replied, and then they sacrificed themselves

And this is the sacrifice of Hunahpu by Xbalanque. One by one his legs, his arms were spread wide. His head came off, rolled far away outside His heart, dug out was smothered in a leaf<sup>6</sup> and all the Xibalbans went crazy at the sight.

So now, only one of them was dancing there: Xbalanque.

“Get up!” he said, and Hunahpu came back to life. The two of them were overjoyed at this—and likewise the lords rejoiced, as if they were doing it themselves One and Seven Death were as glad at heart as if they themselves were actually doing the dance

And then the hearts of the lords were filled with longing, with yearning for the dance of Hunahpu and Xbalanque, so then came these words from One and Seven Death:

“Do it to us! Sacrifice us!” they said “Sacrifice both of us!” said One and Seven Death to Hunahpu and Xbalanque.

“Very well. You ought to come back to life. After all, aren’t you Death?<sup>7</sup> And aren’t we making you happy along with the vassals of your domain?” they told the lords.

And this one was the first to be sacrificed the lord at the very top, the one whose name is One Death, the ruler of Xibalba.

And with One Death dead, the next to be taken was Seven Death. They did not come back to life.

And then the Xibalbans were getting up to leave, those who had seen the lords die. They underwent heart sacrifice there, and the heart sacrifice was performed on the two lords only for the purpose of destroying them.

As soon as they had killed the one lord without bringing him back to life, the other lord had been meek and tearful before the dancers. He didn't consent, he didn't accept it:

[673] "Take pity on me!" he said when he realized. All their vassals took the road to the great canyon, in one single mass they filled up the deep abyss. So they piled up there and gathered together, countless ants, tumbling down into the canyon, as if they were being herded there. And when they arrived, they all bent low in surrender, they arrived meek and tearful.

Such was the defeat of the rulers of Xibalba. The boys accomplished it only through wonders, only through self-transformation.

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Such was the beginning of their disappearance and the denial of their worship.

Their ancient day was not a great one,  
these ancient people only wanted conflict,  
their ancient names are not really divine,  
but fearful is the ancient evil of their faces.  
They are makers of enemies, users of owls,<sup>8</sup>  
they are inciters to wrongs and violence,  
they are masters of hidden intentions as well,  
they are black and white,<sup>9</sup>  
masters of stupidity. masters of perplexity,

as it is said. By putting on appearances they cause dismay.

Such was the loss of their greatness and brilliance. Their domain did not return to greatness. This was accomplished by Hunahpu and Xbalanque.



*From Part 4  
[Origin of Humanity, First Dawn]*

And here is the beginning of the conception of humans, and of the search for the ingredients of the human body. So they spoke, the Bearer, Begetter, the Makers, Modelers named Sovereign Plumed Serpent:

“The dawn has approached, preparations have been made, and morning has come for the provider, nurturer, born in the light, begotten in the light. Morning has come for humankind, for the people of the face of the earth,” they said. It all came together as they went on thinking in the darkness, in the night, as they searched and they sifted, they thought and they wondered.

And here their thoughts came out in dear light. They sought and discovered what was needed for human flesh. It was only a short while before the sun, moon, and stars were to appear above the Makers and Modelers. Broken Place, Bitter Water Place is the name: the yellow corn, white corn came from there.

And these are the names of the animals who brought the food: fox, coyote, parrot, crow. There were four animals who brought the news of the ears of yellow corn and white corn. They were coming from over there at Broken Place, they showed the way to the break)

And this was when they found the staple foods.

And these were the ingredients for the flesh of the human work, the human design, and the water was for the blood. It became human blood, and corn was also used by the Bearer, Begetter.

And so they were happy over the provisions of the good mountain, filled with sweet things, thick with yellow corn, white corn, and thick with pataxte and cacao, countless zapotes, anonas, jocotes, nances, matasanos,<sup>2</sup> sweets—the rich foods filling up the citadel named Broken Place, Bitter Water Place. All the edible fruits were there: small staples, great staples, small plants, great plants. The way was shown by the animals.

And then the yellow corn and white corn were ground, and Xmucane did the grinding nine times. Corn was used, along with the water she rinsed her hands with, for the creation of grease; it became human fat when it was worked by the Bearer, Begetter, Sovereign Plumed Serpent, as they are called.

After that they put it into words:

[674] the making, the modeling of our first mother-father,  
with yellow corn, white corn alone for the flesh,  
food alone for the human legs and arms,  
for our first fathers, the four human works.

It was staples alone that made up their flesh.  
These are the names of the first people who were made and modeled.

This is the first person: Jaguar Quitze.  
And now the second: Jaguar Night  
And now the third: Mahucutah.  
And the fourth: True Jaguar.<sup>3</sup>

And these are the names of our first mother-fathers.<sup>4</sup> They were simply made and modeled, it is said; they had no mother and no father. We have named the men by themselves. No woman gave birth to them, nor were they begotten by the builder, sculptor, Bearer, Begetter. By sacrifice alone, by genius alone They were made, they were modeled by the Maker, Modeler, Bearer, Begetter, Sovereign Plumed Serpent. And when they came to fruition, they came out human:

They talked and they made words.  
They looked and they listened.  
They walked, they worked.

They were good people, handsome, with looks of the male kind. Thoughts came into existence and they gazed; their vision came all at once. Perfectly they saw, perfectly they knew everything under the sky, whenever they looked. The moment they turned around and looked around in the sky, on the earth, everything was seen without any obstruction. They didn't have to walk around before they could see what was under the sky; they just stayed where they were.

As they looked, their knowledge became intense. Their sight passed through trees, through rocks, through lakes, through seas, through mountains, through plains. Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night Mahucutah, and True Jaguar were truly gifted people.

And then they were asked by the builder and mason:

“What do you know about your being? Don't you look, don't you listen? Isn't your speech good, and your wall? So you must look, to see out under the sky. Don't you see the mountain-plain clearly? So try it,” they were told.

And then they saw everything under the sky perfectly. After that, they thanked the Maker, Modeler

“Truly now,  
double thanks,  
triple thanks  
that we've been formed, we've been given  
our mouths, our faces,  
we speak, we listen,  
we wonder, we move,  
our knowledge is good, we've understood  
what is far and near,

and we've seen what is great and small  
under the sky, on the earth.  
Thanks to you we've been formed,  
we've come to be made and modeled,  
our grandmother, our grandfather.”

they said when they gave thanks for having been made and modeled. They understood everything perfectly, they sighted the four sides, the four corners in the sky, on the earth, and this didn't sound good to the builder and sculptor:

[675] “What our works and designs have said is no good:

‘We have understood everything, great and small,’ they say.” And so the Bearer, Begetter took back their knowledge:

“What should we do with them now? Their vision should at least reach nearby, they should see at least a small part of the face of the earth, but what they're saying isn't good. Aren't they merely ‘works’ and ‘designs’ in their very names? Yet they'll become as great as gods, unless they procreate, proliferate at the sowing, the dawning, unless they increase.”

“Let it be this way: now we'll take them apart just a little, that's what we need. What we've found out isn't good. Their deeds would become equal to ours, just because their knowledge reaches so far. They see everything,” so said

the Heart of Sky, Hurricane,  
Newborn Thunderbolt, Raw Thunderbolt,  
Sovereign Plumed Serpent,  
Bearer, Begetter,  
Xpiyacoc, Xmucane,  
Maker, Modeler,

as they are called. And when they changed the nature of their works, their designs, it was enough that the eyes be marred by the Heart of Sky. They were blinded as the face of a mirror is breathed upon. Their eyes were weakened. Now it was only when they looked nearby that things were clear.

And such was the loss of the means of understanding, along with the means of knowing everything, by the four humans. The root was implanted.

And such was the making, modeling of our first grandfather, our father, by the Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth.

And then their wives and women came into being. Again, the same gods thought of it. It was as if they were asleep when they received them, truly beautiful women were there with Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night Mahucutah, and True Jaguar. With their women there they became wider awake. Right away they were happy at heart again, because of their wives.

Celebrated Seahouse is the name of the wife of Jaguar Quitze.

Prawn House is the name of the wife of Jaguar Night.

Hummingbird House is the name of the wife of Mahucutah.

Macaw House is the name of the wife of True Jaguar.

So these are the names of their wives, who became ladies of rank, giving birth to the people of the tribes, small and great.

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And here is the dawning and showing of the sun, moon, and stars. And Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Mahucutah, and True Jaguar were overjoyed when they saw the daybringer.<sup>5</sup> It came up first. It looked brilliant when it came up, since it was ahead of the sun.

After that they unwrapped their copal<sup>6</sup> incense, which came from the east, and there was triumph in their hearts when they unwrapped it. They gave their heartfelt thanks with three kinds at once:

Mixtam Copal is the name of the copal brought by Jaguar Quitze.

Cauiztan Copal, next, is the name of the copal brought by Jaguar Night.

Godly Copal, as the next one is called, was brought by Mahucutah.

The three of them had their copal, and this is what they burned as they incensed the direction of the rising sun. They were crying sweetly as they shook their burning copal,<sup>7</sup> the precious copal.

After that they cried because they had yet to see and yet to witness the birth of the sun.

And then, when the sun came up, the animals, small and great, were happy. They all came up from the rivers and canyons; they waited on all the mountain peaks. Together they looked toward the place where the sun came out.

So then the puma and jaguar cried out, but the first to cry out was a bird, the parrot by name. All the animals were truly happy. The eagle, the white vulture, small birds, great birds spread their wings, and the penitents and sacrificers knelt down.

*From Part 5*  
*[Prayer for Future Generations]*

[676] And this is the cry of their hearts, here it is:

“Wait! On this blessed day,  
thou Hurricane, thou Heart of the Sky-Earth,  
thou giver of ripeness and freshness,  
and thou giver of daughters and sons,  
spread thy stain, spill thy drops  
of green and yellow;<sup>8</sup>  
give life and beginning  
to those I bear and beget,  
that they might multiply and grow,  
nurturing and providing for thee,  
calling to thee along the roads and paths,  
on rivers, in canyons,  
beneath the trees and bushes;  
give them their daughters and sons.

“May there be no blame, obstacle, want or misery;  
let no deceiver come behind or before them,  
may they neither be snared nor wounded,  
nor seduced, nor burned,  
nor diverted below the road nor above it;  
may they neither fall over backward nor stumble;

keep them on the Green Road, the Green Path.

“May there be no blame or barrier for them  
through any secrets or sorcery of thine;  
may thy nurturers and providers be good  
before thy mouth and thy face,  
thou, Heart of Sky; thou, Heart of Earth;  
thou, Bundle of Flames;<sup>9</sup>  
and thou, Tohil, Auilix, Hacauitz,<sup>1</sup>  
under the sky, on the earth,  
the four sides, the four corners;  
may there be only light, only continuity within,  
before thy mouth and thy face, thou god.”

## Notes

1. Translated by Dennis Tedlock.
2. All thirteen names refer to the Creator or to a company of creators, a designation applicable clearly to the first four names and Sovereign Plumed Serpent, Heart of the Lake and Heart of the Sea also since the creators will later be described as “in the water,” and somewhat obscurely, so does the pair of names (Plate and Bowl may be read as “earth” and “sky, respectively). Hunahpu Possum Hunahpu Coyote, Great White Peccary, and Tapir refer specifically to the grandparents of the gods, usually called Xpiyacoc and Xmucane.
3. Four names for Xpiyacoc and Xmucane.
4. The hieroglyphic source (Council Book) was suppressed by missionaries; it was said to have been brought to Quiché in ancient times from the far side of a lagoon (Sea). The reader hides his face to avoid the missionaries.

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5. As though a farmer were measuring and staking a cornfield.
6. Alternate names for Heart of Sky, the deity who cooperates with Sovereign Plumed Serpent. The triple naming adapts the Christian trinity to native theology, perhaps more in the spirit of defiant preemption than of conciliation.
7. That is, humanity, which alone is capable of nurturing the gods with sacrifices.
8. When used together, puz (“cutting edge” or “sacrifice”) and nual (“genius”) are metonyms for shamanic power, referring to the ability to make genius or spiritual essence visible or audible by means of ritual [Translator’s note].
9. That is, the creation of humans; an account of the first three, unsuccessful attempts at creating humans occupies the remainder of Part 1.
1. First mention of the twin hero gods (their origin is recounted in Part 3). Here they confront the false god Seven Mlacaw who has arisen during the time of primordial darkness. boasting, “My eyes are of metal; my teeth just glitter with jewels, and turquoise as well. . . I am like the sun and the moon.” Note that all the characters in Parts 1, 2, and 3 are supernatural; humans are not created until Part 4.
2. A pickle tree (*Byrsonima crassifolia*).



3. This is obviously the origin of the way a macaw's beak looks, with a huge tipper mandible and a much smaller and retreating lower one [Translator's note].
4. Animal names of the divine grandparents, Xpiyacoc and Xmucane, who are also the twins' genealogical grandparents.
5. Play on words as qui is translated as both "sweet" and "poison."
6. The present-day Quiché retain the notion that a toothache is caused by a worm gnawing at the bone [Translator's note].
7. This is clearly meant to be the origin of the large white eye patch and very small eyes of the scarlet macaw [Translator's note].
8. Twin sons of Xpiyacoc and Xmucane; the elder of twins, One Hunahpu, will become the father of Hunahpu and Xbalanque. "As for Seven Hunahpu," according to the text, "he has no wife. He's just a partner and just secondary; he just remains a boy."
9. The first of the "test" houses in Xibalba (the underworld) to which One and Seven Hunahpu, avid ballplayers, have been lured by the underworld lords, One and Seven Death; the lords have promised them a challenging ball game. The Mesoamerican ball game, remotely comparable to both basketball and soccer, was played on a rectangular court, using a ball of native rubber.
1. Probably not a place name, but rather a name for the altar where losing ball players were sacrificed [Translator's note].
2. Fourth-ranking lord of Xibalba, whose commission is to draw blood from people.
3. Forced to flee the underworld the maiden (Blood Woman) finds refuge on earth with Xmucane. There she gives birth to the twins, who, like their father and uncle, become ballplayers and are enticed to the underworld. Surviving the Dark House and other tests, they disguise themselves as vagabonds and earn a reputation as clever entertainers among the denizens of Xibalba; as such they are summoned to entertain the high lords.
4. A metonym for almost any settlement, but especially a fortified, town or citadel, located on a defensible elevation [Translators note].
5. The goatsucker. The dances apparently were imitations of these animals and birds.
6. As a tamale is wrapped. In the typical Mesoamerican heart sacrifice the victim's arms and legs were stretched wide and the heart was excised and offered to a deity.
7. Evident sarcasm.
8. The lords had used owls as messengers to lure the ballplayers to Xibalba.
9. Contradictory, duplicitous.
1. In the widespread Mesoamerican story of the discovery of corn, one or more animals reveal that corn and other foods are hidden within a rock or a mountain, accessible through a cleft; in some versions the mountain is broken apart by lightning.

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2. Quincelike fruits of the tree *Casimiroa edulis*. Pataxte (*Theobroma bicolor*) is a species of cacao that is inferior to cacao proper (*T. cacao*). Zapotes are fruits of the sapota tree (*Lucuma mammosa*). Anonas are custard apples (*genus Anona*). Jocotes are yellow plumlike fruits of the tree *Spondias purpurea*.

3. The four original Quiché males.
4. That is, parents, although only the first three founded lineages; True Jaguar had no son.
5. The morning star.
6. Resin used as incense.
7. Note that the Mesoamerican pottery censer must be shaken or swayed back and forth to keep the incense burning.
8. The imagery, denoting human offspring, alludes to semen and plant growth.
9. A sacred relic left to the Quiché lords by Jaguar Quitze; like the sacred bundles of the North American Indians, a sort of cloth-wrapped ark with mysterious contents [Translator's note].
1. Patron deities of the Quiché lineages.