

INTRODUCTION

THE FIRST FOUR HUMANS, the first four earthly beings who were truly articulate when they moved their feet and hands, their faces and mouths, and who could speak the very language of the gods, could also see everything under the sky and on the earth. All they had to do was look around from the spot where they were, all the way to the limits of space and the limits of time. But then the gods, who had not intended to make and model beings with the potential of becoming their own equals, limited human sight to what was obvious and nearby. Nevertheless, the lords who once ruled a kingdom from a place called Quiché, in the highlands of Guatemala, once had in their possession the means for overcoming this nearsightedness, an *ilb'al*, a "seeing instrument" or a "place to see"; with this they could know distant or future events. The instrument was not a telescope, not a crystal for gazing, but a book.

The lords of Quiché consulted their book when they sat in council, and their name for it was *Popol Vuh* or "Council Book." Because they obtained the book (or some section of it) on a pilgrimage that took them down from the highlands to the Atlantic shore, they called it "The Light That Came from Beside the Sea." Because the book told of events that happened before the first true dawn, and of a time when their ancestors hid themselves and the stones that contained the spirit familiars of their gods in forests, they also called it "Our Place in the Shadows." And because it told of the rise of the morning star and the sun and moon, and foretold the rise and radiant splendor of the Quiché lords, they called it "The Dawn of Life."

Those who wrote the version of the *Popol Vuh* we know today do not give us their personal names, but rather call themselves "we" in its opening pages and "we who are the Quiché people" later on. In contemporary usage "the Quiché people" are an ethnic group in Guatemala, consisting of all those who speak the particular Mayan language that itself has come to be called Quiché; they presently number close to a million and occupy most of the former territory of the kingdom whose development is described in the *Popol Vuh*. To the west and northwest of them

are other Mayan peoples, speaking other Mayan languages, who extend across the Mexican border into the highlands of Chiapas and down into the Gulf coastal plain of Tabasco. To the east and northeast still other Mayans extend just across the borders of El Salvador and Honduras, down into the lowlands of Belize, and across the peninsula of Yucatán. These are the peoples, with a total population of more than six million today, whose ancestors developed what has become known to the outside world as Mayan civilization.

The roots of Mayan civilization may lie in the prior civilization of the Olmecs, which was flowering on the Gulf coastal plain of Veracruz and Tabasco by about 1200 B.C. A more immediate antecedent is the Izapan culture, which ran along the western and southern edges of the Mayan world and reached inside that world at the highland site of Kaminaljuyú, on the west side of what is now Guatemala City. Beginning in the first century B.C., Izapan stone monuments display an iconography and writing system similar to the ones that emerge later in the sites archaeologists designate as properly Mayan. This emergence took place during the period they call the Early Classic (A.D. 300–600), and it was centered in the lowland rain forest that separates the mountain pine forest of Chiapas and Guatemala from the low and thorny scrub forest of northern Yucatán. Swamps were drained and trees were cleared to make way for intensive cultivation. Hieroglyphic texts in great quantity were sculpted in stone and stucco, painted on pottery and plaster, and inked on long strips of paper that were folded like screens to make books.

During the Early Classic period lords from Teotihuacan, the great city of the central Mexican highlands, took control of Kaminaljuyú and established political and trade relationships with such lowland Mayan cities as Tikal. The Late Classic period (A.D. 600–900) opened with the collapse of Teotihuacan and its outpost at Kaminaljuyú, and it saw the establishment of a Mayan presence at Xochicalco and Cacaxtla in central Mexico. In the lowland rain forest, such Mayan cities as Palenque, Tikal, and Caracol rose to their greatest glory, and Chichén Itzá was founded in the north. The southernmost city was Copán, located in the foothills of the highlands rather than in the rain forest. Its rise to prominence coincided with the decline of Kaminaljuyú, and it has recently been revealed that its rulers claimed descent from the royal line of Teotihuacan.

As the Late Classic period drew to a close, the Mayan communities that had carved out a place for themselves in the rain forest, along with Copán, were caught in a deepening vortex of overpopulation, environ-

mental degradation, malnutrition, and warfare. At the same time, they were being bypassed by a developing sea-trade network that reached all the way around Yucatán from Tabasco to Honduras. By A.D. 900, the political and economic strength of the larger city-states had broken under the strain. From that time until the European invasion, the remaining inhabitants of the rain forest lived in smaller towns along the shores of lakes, rivers, and estuaries. The greater part of the Maya population was now divided between two areas that had been on the periphery during Classic times, one in northern Yucatán and the other in the southern highlands. The Late Postclassic (from A.D. 1200 to the European invasion) saw the rise of the kingdom of Mayapán in the north and that of Quiché in the south, both of them tribute-collecting conquest states that followed Chichén Itzá in giving mythic prominence to a divine king named Plumed Serpent. At the core of each of these states was an alliance of noble lineages that was largely Mayan but included Mexicans whose native language was Nahuatl. The heads of these lineages, whatever their places of origin, resided in the capital, surrounded by fortifications.

Carved inscriptions were no longer a major feature of Mayan monuments and buildings during the Postclassic period, but writing and painting flourished on plastered walls and the pages of books. This is especially evident for sites located on or near the east coast of Yucatán, from the island of Cozumel and the mainland sites of Cobá, Tancá, and Tulum in the north down to Santa Rita Corozal in Belize. The illustrations in three of the surviving Mayan books, the ones now known as the Madrid, Paris, and Dresden codices, have strong ties in both style and content to the wall art of this region. Cortés and his men saw many books when they landed on Cozumel, and there is good evidence that the loot they took away with them included the Dresden Codex. The writing in Postclassic books, as compared with Classic writing, shows an increased reliance on phonetic signs, including the use of distinctly Mayan signs to spell out words borrowed from Nahuatl.

The European invasion of the Mayan world began during the sixteenth century, and so did a long history of Mayan resistance that continues right down to the broadcast news of our own day. Backed by means of persuasion that included gunpowder, instruments of torture, and the threat of eternal damnation, the invaders established a monopoly on virtually all major forms of visible public expression, whether in drama, architecture, sculpture, painting, or writing. In the highlands, when they realized that textile designs carried complex messages, they even at-



DRAWING BY CARLOS A. VILLACORTA

tempted to ban the wearing of Mayan styles of clothing. Hundreds of hieroglyphic books were burned by missionaries, but they were still in use as late as the end of the seventeenth century in Yucatán and the beginning of the eighteenth in highland Guatemala. Only four books are known to have survived to the present day, including the three that found their way to Madrid, Paris, and Dresden long ago. A fourth was recovered in 1966 from looters who had found it in a dry cave in Chiapas.

But the survival of ancient Mayan literature was not dependent on the survival of its outward forms. Just as Mayan peoples learned to use the symbolism of Christian saints as masks for ancient gods, so they learned to use the Roman alphabet as a mask for ancient texts. There was no little justice in the fact that it was the missionaries themselves, the burners of the ancient books, who first introduced Mayans to alphabetic writing. What they wanted their pupils to write was translations of Christian prayers, sermons, and catechisms into Mayan languages, but very little time passed before some Mayans found political and religious applications for alphabetic writing that suited their own purposes. These independent writers have left a literary legacy that is both more extensive than the surviving hieroglyphic corpus and more open to understanding. Their most notable works, created as alphabetic substitutes for hieroglyphic books, are the Chilam Balam or "Jaguar Translator" books of Yucatán and the Popol Vuh of Guatemala.

The authors of the alphabetic Popol Vuh were members of the three lordly lineages that had once ruled the Quiché kingdom: the Cauecs, the Greathouses, and the Lord Quichés. They worked in the middle of the sixteenth century, and the scene of their writing was the town of Quiché, northwest of what is now Guatemala City. The east side of this town, on flat land, was new in their day, with low buildings in files on a grid of streets and a tall church on a central plaza. The west side, already in

THE PAGES OF BOOKS: This is a page from the Maya hieroglyphic book known as the Dresden Codex, dating from the fifteenth century. The left-hand column describes the movements of Venus during one of five different types of cycles reckoned for that planet. The right-hand column describes the auguries for the cycle and gives both pictures and names for the attendant deities. In the top picture the seated figure is Hunahpu, called Hun Ahaw in Yucatán. In the middle picture is the god who currently accounts for Venus itself, holding a dart thrower in his left hand and darts in his right. In the bottom picture is his victim, whose shield has been pierced by a dart.

books made under the patronage of these twin gods there is a dialectical relationship between the writing and the pictures: the writing not only records words but sometimes offers pictorial clues to its meaning. As for the pictures, they not only depict what they mean but have elements that can be read as words.

At times the writers of the alphabetic Popol Vuh seem to be describing pictures, especially when they begin new episodes in narratives. In passages like the following, the use of sentences beginning with phrases like "this is" and the use of verbs in the Quiché equivalent of the present tense cause the reader to linger, for a moment, over a lasting image:

This is the great tree of Seven Macaw, a nance, 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.

It must be cautioned, of course, that word pictures painted by storytellers, in Quiché or in any other language, need not have physical counterparts in the world outside the mind's eye. But the present example has an abruptness that suggests a sudden still picture from a story already well under way rather than a moving picture unfolded in the course of the events of that story. The narrators do not describe how the boys arrived "in the leaves of the tree"; the opening scene is already complete, waiting for the blowgun shot that comes in the next sentence, where the main verb is in the Quiché equivalent of the past tense and the still picture gives way to a moving one.

The writing of words in ancient Mayan books was done by means of a script that combines logographic and phonetic principles. Logographic signs, which stand for entire words and sometimes carry pictorial clues to their meaning, are most often used for such common items as day names. Mayan phonetic signs proceed syllable by syllable, with each sign corresponding to a consonant and vowel in combination or (less often) a vowel alone. Where a spelling problem was created by a syllable that had a single vowel bracketed by two consonants, the conventional solution was to treat it as if it were two syllables, each containing one of the consonants, and leave it up to the reader to avoid pronouncing the second vowel sound. This and other syllabic conventions sometimes affected the spelling choices Mayan writers made when they later used the Roman alphabet. For example, if the authors of the Popol Vuh had written in a purely alphabetic manner, they might have spelled the Quiché name of

Macaw House, one of the first four women created by the gods, as Cakixha. What they did instead was to treat its three syllables as if they were four, spelling it Cakixaha (Ca-ki-xa-ha).

More than any other Mayan book, whether hieroglyphic or alphabetic, the Popol Vuh tells us something about the conceptual place of books in the pre-Columbian world. The writers of the alphabetic version explain why the hieroglyphic version was among the most precious possessions of Quiché rulers:

They knew whether war would occur; everything they saw was clear to them. Whether there would be death, or whether there would be famine, or whether quarrels would occur, they knew it for certain, since there was a place to see it, there was a book. "Council Book" was their name for it.

When "everything they saw was clear to them" the Quiché lords were recovering the vision of the first four humans, who at first "saw everything under the sky perfectly." That would mean that the Popol Vuh made it possible, once again, to sight "the four sides, the four corners in the sky, on the earth," the corners and sides that mark the earth and serve as reference points for the movements of celestial lights.

If the ancient Popol Vuh was like the surviving hieroglyphic books, it contained systematic accounts of cycles in astronomical and earthly events that served as a complex navigation system for those who wished to see and move beyond the present. In the case of a section dealing with the planet Venus, for example, there would have been tables of rising and setting dates, pictures of the attendant gods, and brief texts outlining what these gods did when they first established the pattern for the movements of Venus. When the ancient readers of the Popol Vuh took the roles of diviners and astronomers, seeking the proper date for a ceremony or a momentous political act, we may guess that they looked up specific passages, pondered their meanings, and rendered an opinion. But the authors of the alphabetic Popol Vuh tell us that there were also occasions on which readers offered "a long performance and account" whose subject was the lighting of the whole *kajulew* or "sky-earth," which is the Quiché way of saying "world." If a divinatory reading or pondering was a way of recovering the depth of vision enjoyed by the first four humans, a long performance, in which readers may well have covered every major subject in the entire book, was a way of recovering the full cosmic sweep of that vision.

If the authors of the alphabetic Popol Vuh had transposed the ancient Popol Vuh directly, on a glyph-by-glyph basis, they might have produced

a text that would have made little sense to anyone but a fully trained diviner and performer. What they did instead was to quote what readers of the ancient book would say when they gave long performances, telling the full story that lay behind the charts, pictures, and plot outlines of the ancient book. Lest we miss the fact that they are quoting, they periodically insert such phrases as "This is the account, here it is," or "as it is said." At one point they themselves become performers, *speaking directly to us* as if we were members of a live audience rather than mere readers. When they introduce the first episode of a long cycle of stories about the gods who prepared the sky-earth for human life, they propose that we all drink a toast to the heroes.

At the beginning of their book, the authors delicately describe the difficult circumstances under which they work. When they tell us that they are writing "amid the preaching of God, in Christendom now," we can catch a plaintive tone only by noticing that they make this statement immediately after asserting that their own gods "accounted for everything—and did it, too—as enlightened beings, in enlightened words." What the authors propose to write down is what Quichés call the *Ojer Tzij*, the "Ancient Word" or "Prior Word," which has precedence over "the preaching of God." They have chosen to do so because "there is no longer" a Popol Vuh, which makes it sound as though they intend to re-create the original book solely on the basis of their memory of what they have seen in its pages or heard in the long performance. But when we remember their complaint about being "in Christendom," there remains the possibility that they still have the original book but are protecting it from possible destruction by missionaries. Indeed, their next words make us wonder whether the book might still exist, but they no sooner raise our hopes on this front than they remove the book's reader from our grasp: "There is the original book and ancient writing, but the one who reads and assesses it has a hidden identity." Here we must remember that the authors of the alphabetic Popol Vuh have chosen to remain anonymous; in other words, they are hiding their identities. If they are protecting anyone with their enigmatic statements about an inaccessible book or an anonymous reader, it could well be themselves.

The authors begin their narrative in a world that has nothing but an empty sky above and a calm sea below. The action gets under way when the gods who reside in the primordial sea, named Maker, Modeler, Bearer, Begetter, Heart of the Lake, Heart of the Sea, and Sovereign Plumed Serpent, are joined by gods who come down from the primordial sky, named Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth, Newborn Thunderbolt, Sudden Thunderbolt, and Hurricane. These two groups engage in a dialogue,



THE EMERGENCE OF THE EARTH FROM THE WATER: Lake Atitlán, called Najachel in Quiché, with the volcanoes of Cerro de Oro (in the middle distance) and San Pedro (beyond). The contemporary Quichés of Momostenango reckon this as the lake of the south, one of four sacred lakes that mark the four sides of their world.

PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

and in the course of it they conceive the emergence of the earth from the water and the growth of plants and people on its surface. They wish to set in motion a process they call the "sowing" and "dawning," by which they mean several different things at once. There is the sowing of seeds in the earth, whose sprouting will be their dawning, and there is the sowing of the sun, moon, and stars, whose difficult passage beneath

the earth will be followed by their own dawning. Then there is the matter of human beings, whose sowing in the womb will be followed by their emergence into the light at birth, and whose sowing in the earth at death will be followed by dawning when their souls become sparks of light in the darkness.

For the gods, the idea of human beings is as old as that of the earth itself, but they fail in their first three attempts (all in Part One of the present translation) to transform this idea into a living reality. What they want is beings who will walk, work, and talk in an articulate and measured way, visiting shrines, giving offerings, and calling upon their makers by name, all according to the rhythms of a calendar. What they get instead, on the first try, is beings who have no arms to work with and can only squawk, chatter, and howl, and whose descendants are the animals of today. On the second try they make a being of mud, but this one is unable to walk or turn its head or even keep its shape; being solitary, it cannot reproduce itself, and in the end it dissolves into nothing.

Before making a third try the gods decide, in the course of a further dialogue, to seek the counsel of an elderly husband and wife named Xpiyacoc and Xmucane. Xpiyacoc is a divine matchmaker and therefore prior to all marriage, and Xmucane is a divine midwife and therefore prior to all birth. Like contemporary Quiché matchmakers and midwives, both of them are *ajq'ij* or "daykeepers," diviners who know how to interpret the auguries given by thirteen day numbers and twenty day names that combine to form a calendrical cycle lasting 260 days. They are older than all the other gods, who address them as grandparents, and the cycle they divine by is older than the longer cycles that govern Venus and the sun, which have not yet been established at this point in the story. The question the younger gods put to them here is whether human beings should be made out of wood. Following divinatory methods that are still in use among Quiché daykeepers, they give their approval. The wooden beings turn out to look and talk and multiply themselves something like humans, but they fail to time their actions in an orderly way and forget to call upon the gods in prayer. Hurricane brings a catastrophe down on their heads, not only flooding them with a gigantic rainstorm but sending monsters to attack them. Even their own dogs, turkeys, tools, and houses rise against them, taking vengeance for past mistreatment. Their only descendants are the monkeys that inhabit the forests today.

At this point the gods who have been working on the problem of making human beings will need only one more try before they solve it, but the authors of the Popol Vuh postpone the telling of this episode,



DIVINATORY METHODS THAT ARE STILL IN USE: A divination in progress on top of the mountain called Tohil's Place. At left is the client, Lucas Pacheco Benítez, himself a daykeeper. Spread out on the stone at lower right is the paraphernalia of the daykeeper who is divining for him, set up for a counting of days. Burning in the background are offerings of candles and copal incense.

PHOTO BY BARBARA TEDLOCK

turning their attention to stories about two generations of heroic deities whose triumphs make the sky-earth a safer place for human habitation. First come the twin sons of Xpiyacoc and Xmucane, named One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu, together with Blood Moon, the daughter of a lord of the underworld named Blood Gatherer. In the second generation come her twin sons, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, jointly fathered by One and Seven Hunahpu. Both generations of twins are players of the Mesoamerican ball game, in which the rubber ball (an indigenous American invention) is hit with a yoke-shaped device worn on one side of the body, riding just under the arm or resting on the hip. In addition to being ballplayers, One and Seven Hunahpu occupy themselves by gambling with dice, whereas Hunahpu and Xbalanque go out hunting with blowguns.

The adventures of the sons, daughter-in-law, and grandsons of Xpiyacoc and Xmucane are presented in two different cycles, with the episodes

divided between the cycles more on the basis of where they take place in space than when they take place in time. The first cycle deals entirely with adventures on the face of the earth, while the second, though it has two separate aboveground passages, deals mainly with adventures in the underworld, a region named Xibalba or "Place of Fear." If the events of these two cycles were combined in a single chronological sequence, the aboveground episodes might alternate with those below, with the heroes descending into the underworld, emerging on the earth again, and so forth. These sowing and dawning movements of the heroes, along with those of their supporting cast, prefigure the present-day movements of the sun, moon, planets, and stars.

Hunahpu and Xbalanque are the protagonists of the first of the two hero cycles (presented in Part Two), and their enemies are a father and his two sons, all of them pretenders to lordly power over the affairs of the earth. Hurricane, or Heart of Sky, is offended by this threesome, and it is he who sends Hunahpu and Xbalanque against them. The first to get his due is the father, named Seven Macaw, who claims to be both the sun and moon. In chronological terms this episode overlaps with the story of the wooden people (at the end of Part One), since Seven Macaw serves as their source of celestial light and has his downfall at the same time they do. The twins shoot him while he is at his meal, high up in a fruit tree, breaking his jaw and bringing him down to earth. Later they persuade a pair of curers, an elderly couple named Great White Peccary and Great White Coati, to give him the reverse of a face-lift, pulling out his teeth and removing the metal disks from around his eyes. His earthly descendants are scarlet macaws, with broken, toothless jaws and bare white cheeks that turn red when they get excited. He himself remains as the seven stars of the Big Dipper, and his wife, Chimalmat, corresponds to a circle of northern stars that includes the arc of the Little Dipper. In mid-July, when he is already falling from his tree as the night begins, he opens the hurricane season, and in mid-October, when he almost gets back up the tree before morning, he closes it. It was his first fall, brought on by the blowgun shot of Hunahpu and Xbalanque, that opened the way for the great flood that brought down the wooden people. Just as Seven Macaw only pretended to be the sun and moon, so the wooden people only pretended to be human.

Hunahpu and Xbalanque next take on Zipacna, the elder of Seven Macaw's two sons, a crocodilian monster who claims to be the maker of mountains. But first comes an episode in which Zipacna has an encounter with the gods of alcoholic drinks, the Four Hundred Boys. Alarmed by Zipacna's great strength, these boys trick him into digging a deep hole

and try to crush him by dropping a great log down behind him. He survives, but he waits in the hole until they are in the middle of a drunken victory celebration and then brings their own house down on top of them. At the celestial level they become the stars called Motz, the Quiché name for the Pleiades, and their downfall corresponds to early-evening settings of these stars. At the earthly level, among contemporary Quichés, the Pleiades symbolize a handful of seeds, and their disappearance in the west marks the proper time for the sowing of crops.

Zipacna meets his own downfall when Hunahpu and Xbalanque set out to avenge the Four Hundred Boys. At a time when Zipacna has gone without food for several days, they set a trap for him by making a device that appears to be a living, moving crab. Having placed this artificial crab in a tight space beneath an overhang at the bottom of a great mountain, they show him the way there. Zipacna goes after the crab with great passion, and his struggles to wrestle himself into the right position to consummate his hunger become a symbolic parody of sexual intercourse. When the great moment comes the whole mountain falls on his chest (which is to say he ends up on the bottom), and when he heaves a sigh he turns to stone.

Finally there comes the demise of the younger son of Seven Macaw, named Earthquake, who bills himself as a destroyer of mountains. In his case the lure devised by Hunahpu and Xbalanque is the irresistibly delicious aroma given off by the roasting of birds. They cast a spell on the bird they give him to eat: just as it was cooked inside a coating of earth, so he will end up covered by earth. They leave him buried in the east, opposite his elder brother, whose killing of the Four Hundred Boys associates him with the west (where the Pleiades may be seen to fall beneath the earth). Seven Macaw, as the Big Dipper, is of course in the north. He is near the pivot of the movement of the night sky, whereas his two sons make the earth move—though they cannot raise or level whole mountains in a single day as they once did.

Having accounted for three of the aboveground episodes in the lives of Hunahpu and Xbalanque, the Popol Vuh goes back a generation to tell the story of their twin fathers, One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu (at the beginning of Part Three). This is the point at which the authors treat us as if we were in their very presence, introducing One Hunahpu by saying, "Let's drink to him." As the story opens, One Hunahpu is married to Egret Woman and they have twin sons named One Monkey and One Artisan. One and Seven Hunahpu sometimes play ball with these two boys, and a messenger from Hurricane, a falcon, sometimes comes to watch them. The boys become practitioners of all sorts of

arts and crafts, including flute playing, singing, writing, carving, jewelry making, and metalworking. At some point Egret Woman dies, but we are not told how; that leaves Xmucane, the mother of One and Seven Hunahpu, as the only woman in the household.

The ball court of One and Seven Hunahpu lies in the east, at a place called Great Hollow with Fish in the Ashes. Their ball playing offends the lords of Xibalba, who dislike hearing noises above their subterranean domain. The head lords are named One Death and Seven Death, and under them are other lords who specialize in causing such maladies as lesions, jaundice, emaciation, edema, stabbing pains, and sudden death from vomiting blood. One and Seven Death decide to challenge One and Seven Hunahpu to come play ball in the court of Xibalba, which lies at the western edge of the underworld. They therefore send their messengers, who are monstrous owls, to the Great Hollow. One and Seven Hunahpu leave One Monkey and One Artisan behind to keep Xmucane entertained and follow the owls over the eastern edge of the world. The way is full of traps, but they do well until they come to the Crossroads, where each of four roads has a different color corresponding to a different direction. They choose the Black Road, which means, at the terrestrial level, that their journey through the underworld will take them from east to west. At the celestial level, it means that they were last seen in the black cleft of the Milky Way when they descended below the eastern horizon; to this day the cleft is called the Road of Xibalba.

Entering the council place of the lords of Xibalba is a tricky business, beginning with the fact that the first two figures seated there are mere manikins, put there as a joke. The next gag that awaits visitors is a variation on the hot seat, but after that comes a deadly serious test. One and Seven Hunahpu must face a night in Dark House, which is totally black inside. They are given a torch and two cigars, but they are warned to keep these burning all night without consuming them. They fail this test, so their hosts sacrifice them the next day instead of playing ball with them. Both of them are buried at the Place of Ball Game Sacrifice, except that the severed head of One Hunahpu is placed in the fork of a tree that stands by the road there. Now, for the first time, the tree bears fruit, and it becomes difficult to tell the head from the fruit. This is the origin of the calabash tree, whose fruit has the character of a human skull when dried and hollowed.

Blood Moon, the maiden daughter of a Xibalban lord named Blood Gatherer, goes to marvel at the calabash tree. The skull of One Hunahpu, animated by both brothers, now spits in her hand and makes her pregnant with Hunahpu and Xbalanque. A voice comes from the skull, ex-

plaining to her that henceforth a father's face will survive in his son, even after his own face has rotted away and left nothing but bone. After six moons, when Blood Moon's father notices that she is pregnant, he demands to know who is responsible. She answers that "there is no man whose face I've known," which is literally true. He orders the owl messengers of Xibalba to cut her heart out and bring it back in a bowl; armed with the White Dagger, the instrument of sacrifice, they take her away. But she persuades them to spare her, devising a substitute for her heart in the form of a congealed nodule of sap from a croton tree. The lords heat the nodule over a fire and are entranced by the aroma; meanwhile the owls show Blood Moon to the surface of the earth. As a result of this episode it is destined that the lords of Xibalba will receive offerings of incense made from croton sap rather than human blood and hearts. At the astronomical level Blood Moon corresponds to the moon, which appears in the west at nightfall when it begins to wax, just as she appeared before the skull at the Place of Ball Game Sacrifice when she became pregnant.

Once she is out of the underworld, Blood Moon goes to Xmucane and claims to be her daughter-in-law, but Xmucane resists the idea that her own sons could be responsible for Blood Moon's pregnancy. She puts Blood Moon to a test, sending her to get a netful of corn from the garden that One Monkey and One Artisan have been cultivating. Blood Moon finds only a single clump of corn plants there, but she produces a whole netful of ears by pulling out the silk from just one ear. When Xmucane sees the load of corn she goes to the garden herself, wondering whether Blood Moon has stripped it bare. On the ground at the foot of the clump of plants she notices the imprint of the carrying net, which she reads as a sign that Blood Moon is indeed pregnant with her own grandchildren.

To understand how Xmucane is able to interpret the sign of the net we must remember that she knows how to read the auguries of the Mayan calendar, and that one of the twenty day names that go into the making of that calendar is "Net." Retold from a calendrical point of view, the story so far is that Venus rose as the morning star on a day named Hunahpu, corresponding to the ball playing of Xmucane's sons, One and Seven Hunahpu, in the east; then, after being out of sight in Xibalba, Venus reappeared as the evening star on a day named Death, corresponding to the defeat of her sons by One and Seven Death and the placement of One Hunahpu's head in a tree in the west. The event that is due to come next in the story is the rebirth of Venus as the morning star, which should fall, as she already knows, on a day named Net. When she sees the imprint of the net in the field, she takes it as a sign that this

event is coming near and that the sons born to Blood Moon will make it possible.

When Hunahpu and Xbalanque are born they are treated cruelly by their jealous half-brothers, One Monkey and One Artisan, and even by their grandmother. They never utter a complaint, but keep themselves happy by going out every day to hunt birds with their blowguns. Eventually they get the better of their brothers by sending them up a tree to get birds that failed to fall down when they were shot. They cause the tree to grow tall enough to maroon their brothers, whom they transform into monkeys. When Xmucane objects they give her four chances to see the faces of One Monkey and One Artisan again, calling them home with music. They warn her not to laugh, but the monkeys are so ridiculous she cannot contain herself; finally they swing up and away through the treetops for good. One Monkey and One Artisan, both of whose names refer to a single day on the divinatory calendar, correspond to the planet Mars, whose period is thereafter reckoned by that day, and their temporary return to the house of Xmucane corresponds to the retrograde motion of Mars. They are also the gods of arts and crafts, and they probably made their first journey through the sky during the era of the wooden people, who were the first earthly beings to make and use artifacts and who themselves ended up as monkeys.

With their half-brothers out of the way, Hunahpu and Xbalanque decide to clear a garden plot of their own, but when they return to the chosen spot each morning they find that the forest has reclaimed it. By hiding themselves at the edge of the plot one night, they discover that the animals of the forest are restoring the cleared plants by means of a chant. They try to grab each of these animals in turn, but they miss the puma and jaguar completely, break the tails off the rabbit and deer, and finally get their hands on the rat. In exchange for his future share of stored crops, the rat reveals to them that One and Seven Hunahpu left a set of ball game equipment tied up under the rafters of their house, and he agrees to help them get it down. At home the next day, Hunahpu and Xbalanque get Xmucane out of the house by claiming her chili stew has made them thirsty; she goes after water but is delayed when her water jar springs a leak. Then, when Blood Moon goes off to see why Xmucane has failed to return, the rat cuts the ball game equipment loose and the twins take possession of it.

When Hunahpu and Xbalanque begin playing ball at the Great Hollow they disturb the lords of Xibalba, just like their fathers before them. Once again the lords send a summons, but this time the messengers go to Xmucane, telling her that the twins must present themselves in seven

days. She sends a louse to relay the message to her grandsons, but the louse is swallowed by a toad, the toad by a snake, and the snake by a falcon. The falcon arrives over the ball court and the twins shoot him in the eye. They cure his eye with rubber stripped from their ball, which is why this particular species of falcon (the so-called laughing falcon) now has a black patch around the eye. The falcon vomits the snake, who vomits the toad, who still has the louse in his mouth, and the louse recites the message, quoting what Xmucane told him when she quoted what the owls told her when they quoted what the lords of Xibalba told them to say.

Having been summoned to the underworld, Hunahpu and Xbalanque go to take leave of their grandmother, and in the process they demonstrate a harvest ritual that Quichés follow to this day. They “plant” ears of corn in the center of her house, in the attic; these ears are neither to be eaten nor used as seed corn but are to be kept as a sign that corn remains alive throughout the year, even between the drying out of the plants at harvest time and the sprouting of new ones after planting. They tell their grandmother that when a crop dries out it will be a sign of their death, but that the sprouting of a new crop will be a sign that they live again.

The twins play a game with language when they instruct their grandmother; only now, instead of a quotation swallowed up inside other quotations we get a word hidden within other words. The secret word is *Aj*, one of the twenty day names; the twins point to it by playing on its sounds rather than simply mentioning it. When they tell their grandmother that they are planting corn ears (*aj*) in the house (*ja*), they are making a pun on the name *Aj* in the one case and reversing its sound in the other. The play between *Aj* and *ja* is familiar to contemporary Quiché daykeepers, who use it when they explain to clients that the day *Aj* is portentous in matters affecting households. If the twins planted their corn ears in the house on this day, then their expected arrival in Xibalba, seven days later, would fall on the day named Hunahpu. This fits the Mayan Venus calendar perfectly: whenever Venus rises as the morning star on a day named Net, corresponding to the appearance of Hunahpu and Xbalanque on the earth, its next descent into the underworld will always fall on a day named Hunahpu.

Following in the footsteps of their fathers, Hunahpu and Xbalanque descend the road to Xibalba, but when they come to the Crossroads they do things differently. They send a spy ahead of them, a mosquito, to learn the names of the lords. He bites each one of them in turn; the first two lords reveal themselves as mere manikins by their lack of response,

but the others, in the process of complaining about being bitten, address each other by name, all the way down the line. When the twins themselves arrive before the lords, they ignore the manikins (unlike their fathers) and address each of the twelve real lords correctly. Not only that, but they refuse to fall for the hot seat, and when they are given a torch and two cigars to keep lit all night, they trick the lords by passing off a macaw's tail as the glow of the torch and by putting fireflies at the tips of their cigars.

The next day Hunahpu and Xbalanque play ball with the Xibalbans, something their fathers did not survive long enough to do. The Xibalbans insist on putting their own ball into play first, though the twins protest that this ball, which is covered with crushed bone, is nothing but a skull. When Hunahpu hits it back to the Xibalbans with the yoke that rides on his hip, it falls to the court and reveals the weapon that was hidden inside it. This is nothing less than the White Dagger, the same instrument of sacrifice the owls were supposed to use on Blood Moon; it twists its way all over the court, but it fails to kill the twins.

The Xibalbans consent to use the rubber ball belonging to the twins in a further game; this time four bowls of flower petals are bet on the outcome. After playing well for a while the twins allow themselves to lose, and they are given until the next day to come up with the petals. This time they must spend the night in Razor House, which is full of voracious stone blades that are constantly looking for something to cut. In exchange for a promise that they will one day have the flesh of animals as their food, the blades stop moving. This leaves the boys free to attend to the matter of the petals; they send leaf-cutting ants to get them from the very gardens of the lords of Xibalba. The ground-dwelling birds who guard this garden, poorwills and whippoorwills, are so oblivious that they fail to notice that their own tails and wings are being trimmed along with the flowers. The lords, who are aghast when they receive bowls filled with the petals of their own flowers, split the birds' mouths open, giving them the wide gape that birds of the nightjar family have today.

Next, the hero twins survive stays in Cold House, which is full of drafts and falling hail; Jaguar House, which is full of hungry, brawling jaguars; and a house with fire inside. After these horrors comes Bat House, full of moving, shrieking bats, where they spend the night squeezed up inside their blowgun. When the house grows quiet and Hunahpu peeks out from the muzzle, one of the bats swoops down and takes his head off. The head ends up rolling on the ball court of Xibalba, but Xbalanque gives his brother a temporary replacement in the form of a carved squash. While he is performing this head transplant the eastern sky reddens with



CONTEMPORARY QUICHÉ DAYKEEPERS: *All the adults in this picture are daykeepers; in addition, the woman is a midwife, the man wearing a hat is a matchmaker, and the man at right is a singer and prayer maker. The man bending over toward the child is Andrés Xiloj.*

PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

the dawn, and a possum, addressed in the story as “old man,” makes four dark streaks along the horizon. Not only the red dawn but the possum and his streaks are signs that the time of the sun (which has never before been seen) is coming nearer. In the future a new solar year will be brought in by the old man each 365 days; the four streaks signify that only four of the twenty day names—Deer, Tooth, Thought, and Wind—will ever correspond to the first day of a solar year. Contemporary Quiché daykeepers continue to reckon the solar dimension of the Mayan calendar; in the year 2000, for example, they will expect the old man to arrive on February 25, which will fall on One Thought.

Once Hunahpu has been fitted out with a squash for a head, he and Xbalanque are ready to play ball with the Xibalbans again. When the lords send off Hunahpu's original head as the ball, Xbalanque knocks it out of the court and it lands among a group of ball bags. Hidden among the bags is a rabbit, and when it runs away the lords mistake it for the bouncing ball. While they chase it Xbalanque retrieves the head, puts it

back on Hunahpu's shoulders, and then puts the squash among the bags, pretending to find the ball there. Now the squash is put into play, but it wears out and splatters its seeds on the court, revealing to the lords of Xibalba that they have been played for fools. The game played with the squash, like the games played with the bone-covered ball and with Hunahpu's severed head, corresponds to an appearance of Venus in the west, the direction of evening and death. If these events were combined in chronological order with those that take place entirely above ground, they would probably alternate with the episodes in which the twins defeat One Monkey and One Artisan, Seven Macaw, Zipacna, and Earthquake, with each of these latter episodes corresponding to an appearance of Venus in the east, the direction of morning and life.

At this point we are ready for the last of the episodes that prefigure the cycles of Venus and prepare the way for the first rising of the sun. Knowing that the lords of Xibalba plan to burn them, Hunahpu and Xbalanque instruct two seers named Xulu and Pacam as to what they should say when the lords seek advice as to how to dispose of their remains. This done, the twins cheerfully accept an invitation to come see the great stone pit where the Xibalbans are roasting the ingredients for an alcoholic beverage. The lords challenge them to a contest in which the object is to leap clear across the pit, but the boys cut the deadly game short and jump right in. Thinking they have triumphed, the Xibalbans follow the advice of Xulu and Pacam, grinding the bones of the boys and spilling the powder into a river.

After five days Hunahpu and Xbalanque reappear as catfish; the day after that they take human form again, only now they are disguised as vagabond dancers and actors. They gain great fame as illusionists, their most popular acts being the ones in which they set fire to a house without burning it and perform a sacrifice without killing the victim. The lords of Xibalba get news of all this and invite them to show their skills at court; they accept with pretended reluctance. The climax of their performance comes when Xbalanque sacrifices Hunahpu, rolling his head out the door, removing his heart, and then bringing him back to life. One and Seven Death go wild at the sight of this and demand that they themselves be sacrificed. The twins oblige—and, as might already be imagined, these final sacrifices are real ones. Hunahpu and Xbalanque now reveal their true identities before all the inhabitants of the underworld. They declare that henceforth the offerings received by Xibalbans will be limited to incense made of croton sap and to animals, and that Xibalbans will limit their attacks on future human beings to those who have weaknesses or guilt.

At this point the narrators take us back to the twins' grandmother, telling us what she has been doing all this time. She cries when the season comes for corn plants to dry out, signifying the death of her grandsons, and rejoices when they sprout again, signifying rebirth. She burns incense in front of ears from the new crop and thus completes the establishment of the custom whereby humans keep consecrated ears in the house, at the center of the stored harvest. Then the scene shifts back to Hunahpu and Xbalanque, who are about to establish another custom.

Having made their speech to the defeated Xibalbans, the twins go to the Place of Ball Game Sacrifice with the intention of reviving Seven Hunahpu, whose head and body still lie buried there. The full restoration of his face depends on his own ability to pronounce the names of all the parts it once had, but he gets no further than the mouth, nose, and eyes, which remain as notable features of skulls. They leave him there, but they promise that human beings will keep his day (the one named Hunahpu), coming to pray where his remains are. To this day, Hunahpu days are set aside for the veneration of the dead, and graveyards are called by the same word (*jom*) as the ball courts of the Popol Vuh.

At the astronomical level the visit of Hunahpu and Xbalanque to Seven Hunahpu's grave signals the return of a whole new round of Venus cycles, starting with a morning star that first appears on a day named Hunahpu. As for the twins themselves, they rise as the sun and moon. Contemporary Quichés regard the full moon as a nocturnal equivalent of the sun, pointing out that it has a full disk, is bright enough to travel by, and goes clear across the sky in the same time it takes the sun to do the same thing. Most likely the twin who became the moon is to be understood specifically as the full moon, whereas Blood Moon, the mother of the twins, would account for other phases of the moon.

With the ascent of Hunahpu and Xbalanque the Popol Vuh returns to the problem the gods confronted at the beginning: the making of beings who will walk, work, talk, and pray in an articulate manner. The account of their fourth and final attempt at a solution is a flashback, since it takes us back to a time when Seven Macaw had already seen his downfall but the real sun had yet to appear. As we have already seen, the gods failed when they tried using mud and then wood as the materials for the human body, but now they get news of a mountain filled with yellow corn and white corn, discovered by the fox, coyote, parrot, and crow (at the beginning of Part Four). Xmucane grinds the corn from this mountain very finely, and the flour, mixed with the water she rinses her hands with, provides the substance for human flesh, just as the ground bone thrown in the river by the Xibalbans becomes the substance for the rebirth of



THEY ARE CALLED "MOTHER-FATHERS": *Andrés Xiloj* (at left), who read through the *Popol Vuh* text with the present translator and provided numerous comments, is himself a mother-father, or patrilineage head. He is shown here at his house in Momostenango, with his son Anselmo and his daughter-in-law Manuela.

PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

her grandsons. The first people to be modeled from the corn dough are four men named Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Not Right Now, and Dark Jaguar. They are the first four heads of Quiché patrilineages; as in the case of the men who occupy such positions today, they are called "mother-fathers," since in ritual matters they serve as symbolic androgynous parents to everyone in their respective lineages.

This time the beings shaped by the gods are everything they hoped for and more: not only do the first four men pray to their makers, but they have perfect vision and therefore perfect knowledge. The gods are alarmed that beings who were merely manufactured by them should have divine powers, so they decide, after their usual dialogue, to put a fog on human eyes. Next they make four wives for the four men, and from these couples come the leading Quiché lineages. Red Sea Turtle becomes the wife of Jaguar Quitze, who founds the Cauec lineage; Prawn House becomes the wife of Jaguar Night, who founds the Greathouse lineage; and Water Hummingbird becomes the wife of Not Right Now,

who founds the Lord Quiché lineage. Dark Jaguar is also given a wife, Macaw House, but they have no male children. Other lineages also come into being, and they all begin to multiply until they form whole tribes.

All these early events in human history take place in darkness, and all the different tribes wander about and grow weary as they go on watching and waiting for the rising of Venus as the morning star, to be followed by the sun. Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Not Right Now, and Dark Jaguar decide to change their situation by going eastward to a city that is somehow already there. What they seek is elevation to noble rank and the right to establish themselves as lords over an earthly domain. Petitioners from many different tribes converge on the city, speaking a variety of languages. The authors of the *Popol Vuh* describe some of them as rustic "mountain people," including the Quichés and their closest Mayan relatives: Rabinals, Cakchiquels, and "those of the Bird House" (Tzutuhtils).

The *Popol Vuh* gives the eastern city names that reach deep into the Mesoamerican past, calling it Tulan Zuyua, Seven Caves, Seven Canyons. From other Mayan authors we learn that this city had a western twin that shared the name Tulan, which means "Place of Cattails" in Nahuatl. A new reading of the inscriptions at Copán reveals that Mayans knew this name as long ago as the Classic period, and that they applied it to the great western city whose ruins are known today as Teotihuacan. Their closest contact with the world of that city, while it was still in its glory, was through its eastern outpost at Kaminaljuyú, which is a likely candidate for the eastern city of the *Popol Vuh*.

By specifying that their Tulan was the one named Zuyua, the authors of the *Popol Vuh* further indicate its eastern position. When other Mayan authors mention both members of an east-west pair of cities, they reserve this name for the eastern one. Whatever language it came from, Zuyua came to mean "twisted" or "deceptive" in Yucatec Maya and referred to riddles that pretenders to lordly positions were required to answer. As for the names Seven Caves and Seven Canyons, they evoke both cities. At Teotihuacan, the Pyramid of the Sun rises directly above a cave whose main shaft and side chambers add up to seven, while Kaminaljuyú is located on a tableland that falls away into multiple canyons.

During their stay in the eastern city, the Quiché ancestors are given patron deities. Among these the first in rank is Tohil, patron of the Cauecs and two lesser lineages, the Tams and Ilocs. Next comes Aulix, god of the Greathouses, and then Hacauitz, god of the Lord Quichés. It is not known what language was spoken at Kaminaljuyú, but the names of all three of these gods are of Cholan origin, belonging to the same

branch of the Mayan family as the inscriptions at Copán. Tohil, who stands on one leg, provides fire, and thirsts for blood, is very much like the one-legged patron deity of Classic Maya rulers, whose image takes the form of a scepter.

Tohil introduces the element of riddling into the story. When a great hailstorm puts out the fires of all the visitors to the city, he makes himself into a fire drill on behalf of the Quichés, pivoting on one leg and using his sandal as the drill socket. Members of other tribes, shivering with cold, beg for a little of his fire, but he refuses to let them have it unless they promise to embrace him someday, allowing themselves to be suckled. Not realizing that he is speaking the twisted language of Zuyua, they agree to this. When the time comes for the Quiché lords to subjugate the members of these tribes, being “suckled” by Tohil will mean having their hearts cut out as a sacrifice to him. Only the Cakchiquels, who get their fire by sneaking past everyone else in the smoke, escape this fate.

The Cakchiquel version of the visit to the city weaves in threads that seem to belong to the Late Classic period, when Teotihuacan had fallen and Copán had replaced Kaminaljuyú as the greatest city of the Mayan highlands. Two details point straight to Copán itself. First, we are told that the lords of the city had a bat as their insignia. Second, just as the Cakchiquel visitors to the city were passing through its gate, they heard one of the world’s most dramatic bird cries, that of the brown-backed solitaire. It happens that the hieroglyphic emblem of the rulers of Copán features the profiled head of a leaf-nosed bat and spells out the word *xwukpi*, the term for the brown-backed solitaire in the Mayan language

THE HEAD OF A BAT: *The heraldic emblem of the lords of the Classic Maya city of Copán, with the profile of a leaf-nosed bat facing left at the center. The bat’s head, itself a hieroglyph, forms the first syllable of a phrase that continues to the right of the bat’s mouth and runs clockwise around its head from there. The first full word is xwukpi, a term for the brown-backed solitaire and the name of the ruling lineage of Copán; then comes the title of the ruler himself, ch’ul pop ahaw, “Lord of the Holy Council.”*



DRAWING BY THE AUTHOR

that was spoken there. A further clue that may point to Copán appears in the Popol Vuh, where the Quiché ancestors continue to watch for the first appearance of the morning star after they leave the city, an act that turns their gaze back toward the east. It happens that the inscriptions of Copán give more attention to Venus than those of any other major Classic Maya site.

When Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Not Right Now, and Dark Jaguar leave the eastern city, they pack the gods they were given on their backs. Singing a song in which they lament the loss of a cosmopolitan life, they begin their search for a place to found their own kingdom. Eventually they pass Great Hollow with Fish in the Ashes, the location of the eastern ball court where the sons and grandsons of Xmucane once played. Moving westward and a little south, they reach a mountain called Place of Advice, not very far south of the site where they will one day reach their greatest glory. Still with them at this point, having accompanied them all the way from the city, are the Rabinals, Cakchiquels, and Bird House people.

Up on the mountain, Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Not Right Now, and Dark Jaguar observe a great fast together with their wives, Red Sea Turtle, Prawn House, Water Hummingbird, and Macaw House. During the fast Tohil, Auilix, and Hacauitz speak to them, asking to be given hiding places so that they will not be captured by enemies of the Quichés. After a search through the highland pine forest, the three gods are hidden at places that are named after them. At first they are put beneath arbors decorated with bromeliads and hanging mosses, Tohil on a mountain and Auilix in a canyon, but Hacauitz, on his own mountain, is eventually put at the top of a great pyramid. The Cauecs, Greathouses, and Lord Quichés all wait for the approaching dawn on the mountain of Hacauitz; the Tams and Ilocs wait on nearby mountains; while peoples other than the Quichés wait at more distant places. When, at last, they all see the “sun carrier,” or the morning star, they give thanks by burning the incense they have kept for this occasion, ever since they left the city.

At this point we reach the moment in the account of human affairs that corresponds to the final event in the account of the lives of the gods: the Sun himself rises. On just this one occasion he appears as an entire person, so hot that he dries out the face of the earth. His heat turns Tohil, Auilix, and Hacauitz to stone, along with such pumas, jaguars, and snakes as there were at the time. A diminutive god called White Sparkstriker escapes petrification by going into the shade of the trees, becoming the keeper of the stone animals. He remains to this day as a

gamekeeper, with volcanic concretions, fulgurites, and meteorites that resemble animals in his personal care. He may be encountered in forests and caves, or on dark nights and in dreams; he appears in contemporary masked dramas dressed entirely in red, the color of dawn.

At first the Quichés rejoice when they see the sunrise, but then they remember their “brothers,” the members of other tribes who were with them at the eastern city. They sing their lament again, wondering where their brothers might be at this very moment. In effect, the coming of the first sunrise reunites the tribes despite the fact that they remain widely separated in space. As the Popol Vuh has it, “There were countless peoples, but there was just one dawn for all tribes.” What makes such a vision of unity possible is the possession of a common calendar. All Mesoamerican peoples shared the 260-day calendar whose auguries were first read by Xpiyacoc and Xmucane, and they used its rhythms to measure off those of the sun, and moon, and planets.

Having seen the first sunrise from the mountain of Hacautitz, the Quichés eventually build a citadel there. Wherever Hacautitz may have been, it is mentioned in a Late Classic inscription at the lowland site of Seibal. At first, even while the people of other tribes are becoming thickly settled and can be seen traveling the roads in great numbers, the Quichés remain rustic and rural, gathering the larvae of yellow jackets, wasps, and bees for food and staying largely out of sight. When they go before the petrified forms of Tohil, Auilix, and Hacautitz, they burn bits of pitchy bark and wildflowers as substitutes for refined incense, and they offer blood drawn from their own bodies. The three gods are still able to speak to them, but only by appearing in spirit form. Tohil tells them to augment their offerings with the blood of deer and birds taken in the hunt, but they grow dissatisfied with this arrangement and begin to cast eyes on the people they see walking by in the roads. From hiding places on

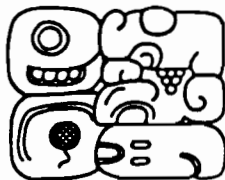
mountain peaks, they begin imitating the cries of the coyote, fox, puma, and jaguar.

Finally Tohil reminds his followers that members of other tribes once promised to embrace him, allowing him to suckle. Now the Quichés begin to seize people they find out walking alone or in pairs, taking them away to cut them open before Tohil, Auilix, and Hacautitz and then rolling their heads out onto the roads. At first the lords who rule the victimized tribes think these deaths are the work of wild animals, but then they suspect the worshippers of Tohil, Auilix, and Hacautitz and attempt to track them down. Again and again they are foiled by rain, mist, and mud, but they do discover that the three gods, whose spirit familiars take the form of adolescent boys, have a favorite bathing place. They send two beautiful maidens, Lust Woman and Wailing Woman, to wash clothes there, instructing them to tempt the boys and yield to any advances. They warn the maidens to return with proof of the success of their mission, which must take the form of presents from the boys.

Contrary to plan, the three Quiché gods fail to lust after Lust Woman and Wailing Woman, but they do agree to provide them with presents. They give them three cloaks, one brocaded with the figure of a jaguar by Jaguar Quitze, another with an eagle by Jaguar Night, and the third with swarms of yellow jackets and wasps by Not Right Now. When the maidens return the enemy lords are so pleased with the cloaks that they cannot resist trying them on. All is well until the brocaded wasps of the third cloak turn into real ones. Lust Woman and Wailing Woman are spurned; despite their failure to tempt Tohil, Auilix, and Hacautitz they become the first prostitutes, or what Quichés call “barkers of shins.” As for the enemy lords, they resolve to make war, launching a massive attack on the Quiché citadel at Hacautitz.

The enemy warriors come at night in order to get as far as possible without resistance, but they fall into a deep sleep on the road. The Quichés not only strip them of all the metal ornaments on their weapons and clothes, but pluck out their eyebrows and beards as well. They press on the next day, determined to recover their losses, but the Quichés are well prepared. What the enemy lookouts see all around the citadel of Hacautitz is a wooden palisade; visible on the parapet are rows of warriors, decked out with the very metal objects that were stolen during the night. What the lookouts do not see is that these warriors are mere wooden puppets, and that behind the palisade, on each of its four sides, is a large gourd filled with yellow jackets and wasps, put there at the suggestion of Tohil. As for the Quichés on the inside, what they see, once the attack begins, is more than twenty-four thousand warriors converging on them,

HACAUTITZ: A four-part glyph from Stele 8 at Seibal, carved during the ninth century. It refers to the place of origin of a lord from elsewhere than Seibal, reading ha- (upper left) -ka- (lower left) -witz- (upper right) -il (lower right); hakawitzil means “from Hacautitz.”



DRAWING BY LINDA SCHELE

bristling with weapons and shouting continuously. But Tohil has made them so confident that they treat the attack as a great spectacle, bringing their women and children up on the parapet to see it. When they release the yellow jackets and wasps their enemies drop their weapons and attempt to flee, so badly stung they hardly even notice the blows they receive from conventional Quiché weapons. The survivors become permanent payers of tribute to the Quiché lords.

After their great victory, Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Not Right Now, and Dark Jaguar begin preparing, with complete contentment, for what they know to be their approaching death. They sing the lament they last sang at the first sunrise, and then they explain to their wives and successors that "the time of our Lord Deer" has come around again. This is a reference to the transition from one solar year to another, in particular from a year ruled by Lord Wind, beginning on a day named Wind, to a year whose first day will be Deer. Lord Wind rules from a western mountain, while Lord Deer rules from an eastern one. The Quiché forefathers choose the passage to the easterly year to announce that they intend to return to the east. Jaguar Quitze leaves behind a sacred object called the "Bundle of Flames," a sort of cloth-wrapped ark with mysterious contents, as a "sign of his being." Neither he nor the others are ever seen again, but their descendants burn incense before the Bundle of Flames in remembrance of them, just as Xmucane burned incense before the ears of corn in remembrance of Hunahpu and Xbalanque.

The Quiché lords of the second generation, following the instructions of their fathers, go eastward on a pilgrimage (at the beginning of Part Five). Unlike their fathers, they do this with the intention of returning in the flesh. Noble Two goes on behalf of the Cauac lineage, Noble Acutec represents the Greathouses, and Noble Lord represents the Lord Quichés. Here the authors of the Popol Vuh have foreshortened time; an alternative Quiché account puts these same individuals not in the second but in the fourth generation. In any case they go all the way down to the lowlands, and at some point they cross a "sea," or what is described in other accounts as both a lake and a sea, on a stone causeway. This would be one of the ancient stone causeways of Yucatán, perhaps the one that ran northward across a lake on its way to Cobá. No name is given for their destination, but when they get there they come before the ruler of a large kingdom. He gives them the royal titles Keeper of the Mat and Keeper of the Reception House Mat, the one belonging to a head of state and the other to an overseer of tribute collection. Both of these titles go to the Cauacs, but other sources add that the Greathouse and Lord Quiché lineages also receive titles at this time, with the position of

Lord Minister (ranking third) going to one and that of Herald (ranking fourth) to the other.

The titles bestowed on the pilgrims are venerable Mayan ones, yet the ruler who bestows them is called by the Nahua name Nacxit. In Yucatec accounts this is one of the names of the god-king Plumed Serpent, who established himself at Chichén Itzá at some time during the transition from the Classic to the Postclassic period, but it was used by later rulers as well. The Nacxit of the Popol Vuh does not give his Quiché visitors patron deities, as did the rulers of the eastern city visited by their forefathers, but rather gives them canopies, thrones, musical instruments, cosmetics, and ornaments that serve as emblems of lordship. Where the names of the patron deities were Cholan, the foreign words in the list of emblems are either Yucatec, as in the case of a gourd container of tobacco called *k'us b'us*, or Nahua, as in the case of a food bowl called *kaxkon* (from *caxcomulli*). Somewhere along the way, when the pilgrims are "beside the sea," they also acquire "the writing of Tulan, the writing of Zuyua." This would be the hieroglyphic Popol Vuh, or at least the part of it known as "The Light That Came from Beside the Sea." It seems likely that the coast in question was the eastern one of Yucatán, which was not only a source of books but famous for its places of pilgrimage as well.

When Noble Two, Noble Acutec, and Noble Lord return from their pilgrimage, their sovereignty is recognized not only by the Quichés themselves, but by the Rabinals, Cakchiquels, and Bird House people as well. Only now do the Quiché lords begin to have what the Popol Vuh calls "fiery splendor." It seems likely that their pilgrimage was conceived as a reenactment of the adventures of Hunahpu and Xbalanque in Xibalba, who had only the planet Venus to their credit when they first descended in the east at the Great Hollow, but who eventually returned with the greater splendor of the sun and full moon.

Eventually the Quichés leave Hacauitz and settle at a succession of other sites. The Popol Vuh mentions only one of these by name, Thorny Place, settled at some point after the deaths of Noble Two, Noble Acutec, and Noble Lord. This move temporarily takes the Quichés back in the direction from which they came, to a point between Place of Advice and the Great Hollow. When they move again two generations later, they resume their original trajectory and go farther west than ever before. With Noble Sweatbath as Keeper of the Mat and Iztayul as Keeper of the Reception House Mat, they found the citadel of Bearded Place, directly across a canyon to the south of the site that later becomes their greatest citadel.

At Bearded Place there is great harmony among the Cauecs, Greathouses, and Lord Quichés; these three lineages, each with its own palace, are tied together through intermarriage. At Thorny Place women were married off in exchange for modest favors and gifts, but now, at Bearded Place, wedding arrangements are accompanied by elaborate feasting and drinking. The only disturbance during this period comes from the Ilocs, who first try to get Iztayul involved in a plot to assassinate Noble Sweatbath and then go so far as to mount a direct attack on Bearded Place. They are defeated, and some of their own number are sacrificed before the gods of their intended victims. The Cauec, Greathouse, and Lord Quiché lineages now gain greater and greater power, defeating some tribes in direct attacks and terrorizing still others by having them witness the sacrifice of prisoners of war.

In the next generation the Keeper of the Mat takes the name Plumed Serpent, while the Keeper of the Reception House Mat is Noble Sweatbath, named after the previous Keeper of the Mat. They build a new and larger citadel across the canyon from Bearded Place, at Rotten Cane. The three leading lineages, faced with increased numbers and torn by quarrels over inflation in the costs of marriage, break apart into smaller groups. The Cauecs divide into nine segments, the Greathouses into nine, and the Lord Quichés into four, with each of these segments headed by a titled lord and occupying its own palace. In addition, the inhabitants of Rotten Cane include the Zauquics, a lineage not previously mentioned in the Popol Vuh, divided into two segments but occupying only a single palace, making twenty-three palaces in all. Along with all these palaces, Rotten Cane is provided with three pyramids that bear the temples of Tohil, Aulix, and Hacauitz, ranged around a central plaza; elsewhere is a fourth pyramid for Corn tassal, the god of the Zauquics.

The Popol Vuh identifies Plumed Serpent, who holds the titles of both Keeper of the Mat and Keeper of the Reception House Mat during at least part of his reign at Rotten Cane, as “a true lord of genius.” He has the power to manifest his personal spirit familiars, putting on performances in which he transforms himself into a snake, an eagle, a jaguar, or a puddle of blood, climbing to the sky or descending to Xibalba. As the Popol Vuh explains it, his displays are “just his way of revealing himself,” but they have the effect of terrorizing the lords of other tribes. The next Quiché lords to manifest genius, coming two generations later, are Quicab, who serves as Keeper of the Mat, and Cauizimah, who serves as Keeper of the Reception House Mat. Under their rule the dominion of the Quichés reaches its greatest extent. Where Plumed Serpent gained power through spectacular displays of shamanic skill, Quicab now gains



PYRAMIDS THAT BEAR THE TEMPLES: At left is one of the pyramids of Iximché, a site whose buildings are far better preserved than those of Rotten Cane. When the Cakchiquels ended their allegiance with the Quichés, two generations after the founding of Rotten Cane, Iximché became their capital. To the right of the pyramid is a long platform on which a palace once stood. Major structures, here and at Rotten Cane, were covered with plaster (fragments of which are visible in the picture) and painted with polychrome murals.

PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

it by conquest, extending the kingdom southwestward as far as the present-day border of Mexico. Not content with merely overpowering the citadels of surrounding peoples, he sends out loyal vassals, called

“guardians of the land” or “lookout lineages,” to serve as forces of occupation. The stationing of these guardians is conceived as analogous to the construction of a palisade; they turn the entire Quiché kingdom into one great fortress.

During this period the settlement at the center of the Quiché kingdom embraced a cluster of four citadels, with Rotten Cane at the focal point. Together with the ordinary houses that occupied the lower or less defensible land around them, these four sites made up a larger town that took the name Quiché. It was perhaps the most densely built-up area that had existed in highland Guatemala since the Early Classic, and it took on the stature of the place where Noble Two, Noble Acutec, and Noble Lord had gone to receive the titles and emblems of truly glorious lordship. Five generations after their pilgrimage a new conferring of titles took place, only now it was not pilgrims but the heads of the leading lookout lineages who were ennobled, and it happened not under the authority of Nacxit, lord of a distant and ever more mythic domain, but under Quicab, who ruled from Quiché.

The town of Quiché not only took on the status of the place visited by the pilgrims who received titles from Nacxit, but of the eastern city visited by their forefathers as well. When the founders of the ruling Quiché lineages and their closest allies left that city before the first sunrise, they had come away with tribal gods whose names were “meant to be in agreement,” and they were “in unity” when they passed the Great Hollow and convened at Place of Advice. Now, in this latter day, “the word came from just one place” again, and the allies convened in a town and “came away in unity” again, but this time they came away “having heard, there at *Quiché*, what all of them should do.” It was probably during this period that the Quiché lords went so far as to have an artificial cave constructed directly beneath Rotten Cane, a cave whose main shaft and side chambers add up to seven. Not content with honoring the memory of the eastern city, they brought the Seven Caves of Teotihuacan, the greatest of all the ancient cities, to the time and place of their own greatest glory.

It is in the course of explaining the greatness of lords like Plumed Serpent and Quicab that the writers of the alphabetic Popol Vuh tell us how its hieroglyphic predecessor was put to use, serving as a way of seeing into distant places and times. Greatness also came to the lords through their participation in religious retreats. For long periods they would stay in the temples, praying, burning incense, letting their own blood, sleeping apart from their wives, and abstaining not only from meat

but from corn products, eating nothing but the fruits of various trees. The shortest fast lasted 180 days, corresponding to half the 360-day cycle (separate from the solar year) that was used in keeping chronologies of historical events, and another lasted 260 days, or one complete run of the cycle whose days were counted by Xpiyacoc and Xmucane when they divined for the gods. The longest fast, 340 days, corresponded to a segment of the Mayan Venus calendar, beginning with the departure of Venus as the morning star and continuing through its stay in the underworld and its period of reappearance as the evening star, leaving just eight days to go before its rebirth as the morning star. This fast probably commemorated the heroic adventures of Hunahpu and Xbalanque in Xibalba, the long darkness endured by the first generation of lords as they watched for the first appearance of the morning star, and perhaps the lowland pilgrimage undertaken by Noble Two, Noble Acutec, and Noble Lord.

The Quiché lords sought identification with the very gods, not only in their pilgrimages, shamanic feats, limitless vision, and long fasts, but in the requirements they set for their subjects. Just as the gods needed human beings to nurture them with offerings, so human lords required subjects to bring them tribute. As the Popol Vuh points out, the “nurture” required by the Quiché lords consisted not only of the food and drink that were prepared for them, but of turquoise, jade, and the iridescent blue-green feathers of the quetzal. Such precious objects as these were considered the ultimate fruits of the blue-green world of earth and sky.

Near the end, the Popol Vuh lists all the noble titles held by the various segments of the Cauec, Greathouse, and Lord Quiché lineages (in rank order), and it gives the names of those who held the highest titles (in the order of their succession). In the case of the two leading segments of the Cauec lineage, those whose heads held the titles of Keeper of the Mat and Keeper of the Reception House Mat, the text lists four generations after Quicab and Cauizimah, who were in the seventh generation, without comment. Then, in the twelfth generation, the names Three Deer and Nine Dog are followed by two sentences whose combination of gravity and brevity gives the reader a chill. The first is, “And they were ruling when Tonatiuh arrived,” Tonatiuh or “he who goes along getting hot” being the name given by the Aztecs to Pedro de Alvarado, the man whose forces destroyed Rotten Cane in 1524. And the second sentence about Three Deer and Nine Dog is simply, “They were tortured by the Castilian people.” Alvarado, convinced that they

had plotted against him, hung them by their wrists as an aid to interrogation. Afterward he had them executed, but what struck the authors of the Popol Vuh was the torture.

In the thirteenth generation of Cauecs the Popol Vuh lists Black Butterfly and Tepepul, who were "tributary to the Castilian people." Then, at the end of the list of Cauec generations, come the first lords who adopted Spanish names, Juan de Rojas and Juan Cortés, the living holders of the titles of Keeper of the Mat and Keeper of the Reception House Mat when the alphabetic Popol Vuh was written. Today Quichés ideally list either nine or thirteen generations when they invoke their ancestors in prayer; from this we can see that the thirteen generations of lords named as preceding Juan de Rojas and Juan Cortés need not be taken as constituting an exhaustive genealogy, but may rather be the names these two men were using in their current prayers.

By giving us the names of Quiché lords who were alive while they were writing, the authors of the alphabetic Popol Vuh also give us the means for dating their work. They could not have finished it any later than 1558, since by that year the name of Juan de Rojas is missing from documents he would have signed had he still been among the living. And since they mention Pedro de Robles of the Greathouse lineage as the current Lord Minister, they could not have finished any earlier than 1554, at which time his predecessor was still in office. During this same period Juan Cortés, whose duties as Keeper of the Reception House Mat would have included tribute collection had he served before the coming of Alvarado, worked constantly to restore tribute rights to the lordly lineages of the town of Quiché. In 1557 he went all the way to Spain to press his case, and it could be that he took a copy of the alphabetic Popol Vuh with him. He continued to make claims when he returned to Guatemala in 1558, prompting a missionary to warn Philip II that "this land is new and not confirmed in the faith," and that Cortés, "son of idolatrous parents, would need to do very little to restore their ceremonies and attract their former subjects to himself." Quiché rights to collect tribute never were restored, but over the next thirty years Juan Cortés did take a considerable role in appointing and installing the leaders of various towns that had once been under Quiché rule.

By the time the authors of the Popol Vuh have finished listing noble titles and the names of the persons who held them, they are only a few sentences away from finishing their work. At this point they single out one of the lesser titles for further discussion, a move that seems anticlimactic until we realize that they are giving us a clue to their own identity. Without naming any individuals, they point out that each of the three

leading lineages included one lord bearing the title of Master of Ceremonies. Here we may recall that when the authors introduced the story of One Hunahpu, they themselves proposed a toast to the reader. If we look for masters of ceremonies among the contemporary Quiché we find the professional matchmakers, who preside over the feasts where marriage arrangements are completed. If our mysterious authors were themselves the three Masters of Ceremonies, and if their duties included speaking at wedding banquets, that would help explain why they took a special interest in marriage customs when they recounted the life and times of successive Quiché citadels. Indeed, they specifically noted the point at which feasting and drinking first became a part of the negotiations for a bride.

The authors give us one final clue to their identity when they tell us that the three Masters of Ceremonies are "Mothers of the Word" and "Fathers of the Word." The combination of "Mother" and "Father" suggests the contemporary daykeepers called mother-fathers, who serve as the ritual heads of patrilineages; it is from their ranks that matchmakers are drawn. Moreover, matchmakers are admired above all other public performers for their eloquence. The focus on "the Word," coming as it does near the very end of a work whose opening line promised to give us the "Ancient Word," suggests that the Word parented by the Masters of Ceremonies and the Word written down in the alphabetic Popol Vuh are one and the same. If so, we know who one of the writers was. As of 1554, the current Master of Ceremonies for the Cauecs was a man named Cristóbal Velasco.

At the end of their work the authors repeat the enigma they presented near the beginning, allowing us to wonder whether the hieroglyphic Popol Vuh might still exist somewhere, only now they say it has been "lost" instead of telling us that the reader is hiding his identity. They close on a note of reassurance, asking us, in effect, to accept what they have written without demanding a closer look at their sources, since "everything has been completed here concerning Quiché," meaning the place named Quiché. Then, lest we forget their difficult circumstances, they add the phrase, "which is now named Santa Cruz," or "Holy Cross." Here again they take us back to the beginning, where they told us, "We shall write about this now amid the preaching of God, in Christendom now."

Today, even when Quiché daykeepers go to a remote mountaintop shrine, sending up great clouds of incense for multitudes of deities and ancestors, they sometimes begin and end by running through an "Our Father" and a "Hail Mary" and crossing themselves. It is as if the alien

eye and ear of the conqueror were present even under conditions of solitude and required the recitation of two spells, one to ward them off for a while and the other to readmit their existence. Between these protective spells daykeepers are left to enter, in peace, a world whose obligations they know to be older than those of Christianity, obligations to the mountains and plains where they continue to live and to all those who have ever lived there before them. So it is with the authors of the Popol Vuh, who mention Christendom on the first page, Holy Cross on the last page, and open up the whole sky-earth, vast and deep, within.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the Popol Vuh, considered in its entirety, is the vast temporal sweep of its narrative. It begins in darkness, with a world inhabited only by gods, and continues all the way past the dawn into the time of the humans who wrote it. The surviving Mayan hieroglyphic books abound with gods, but they seem to stop short of dealing directly with the acts of mortals. The Dresden book does have one page that shifts the action to the human sphere, but the following pages were torn off at some time in the past. If we wish to find hieroglyphic texts that have the same proportion between divine and human affairs as the alphabetic Popol Vuh, we must leave the time and place in which it was written and go a thousand years back and hundreds of miles away to the Classic Maya site of Palenque, down in the rain forest.

At Palenque, in the sanctuary of each of the three temples in what is now known as the Cross Group, is a stone tablet bearing a hieroglyphic narrative. In each case the text is divided into two panels, one of which begins with the deeds of gods, and the other of which ends with the deeds of human lords whose own scribes were the authors of the inscriptions. In the middle of this narrative, where the reader passes from one panel to the other, is a transition from divine to human characters. So also with the Popol Vuh: about halfway through, the reader comes to a transition between what might be called "myth" and "history" (at the end of Part Three). The characters in the narrative are still divine at this point, but they are described as performing rituals for the veneration of ripened corn and deceased relatives, rituals that are meant to be followed by future humans rather than by ancient gods. After this episode, in which the gods act like people, comes another in which people act like gods (at the beginning of Part Four). The people in question are the first four humans, the ones who saw and understood everything in the sky-earth. Once their perfect vision has been taken away the narrative begins to sound more like history as it moves along, though human characters continue to aspire to deeds of divine proportions.

We tend to think of myth and history as being in conflict with each

other, but the authors of the inscriptions at Palenque and the alphabetic text of the Popol Vuh treated the mythic and historical parts of their narratives as belonging to a single, balanced whole. By their sense of proportion, the Egyptian Book of the Dead would need a second half devoted to human deeds in the land of the living, and the Hebrew Testament would need a first half devoted to events that took place before the fall of Adam and Eve. In the case of ancient Chinese literature, the Book of Changes, which is like the Popol Vuh in being subject to divinatory interpretation, would have to be combined with the Book of History in a single volume.

To this day the Quiché Maya think of dualities in general as complementary rather than opposed, interpenetrating rather than mutually exclusive. Instead of being in logical opposition to one another, the realms of divine and human actions are joined by a mutual attraction. If we had an English word that fully expressed the Mayan sense of narrative time, it would have to embrace the duality of the divine and the human in the same way the Quiché term *kajulew* or "sky-earth" preserves the duality of what we call the "world." In fact we already have a word that comes close to doing the job: *mythistory*, taken into English from Greek by way of Latin. For the ancient Greeks, who set about driving a wedge between the divine and the human, this term became a negative one, designating narratives that should have been properly historical but contained mythic impurities. For Mayans, the presence of a divine dimension in narratives of human affairs is not an imperfection but a necessity, and it is balanced by a necessary human dimension in narratives of divine affairs. At one end of the Popol Vuh the gods are preoccupied with the difficult task of making humans, and at the other humans are preoccupied with the equally difficult task of finding the traces of divine movements in their own deeds.

The difference between a fully mythistorical sense of narrative time and the European quest for pure history is not reducible to a simple contrast between cyclical and linear time. Mayans are always alert to the reassertion of the patterns of the past in present events, but they do not expect the past to repeat itself exactly. Each time the gods of the Popol Vuh attempt to make human beings they get a different result, and except for the solitary person made of mud, each attempt has a lasting result rather than completely disappearing into the folds of cyclical time. Later, when members of the second generation of Quiché lords go on a pilgrimage that takes them into the lowlands, their journey is not described as a literal repetition of the journey of Hunahpu and Xbalanque to Xibalba, nor even as a retracing of the journey of the human founders

of the ruling Quiché lineages, but is rather allowed its own character as a unique event, an event that nevertheless carries constant echoes of the past. The effect of these events, like others, is cumulative, and it is a specifically human capacity to take each of them into account separately while at the same time recognizing that they double back on one another.

In theory, if we who presently claim to be human were to forget our efforts to find the traces of divine movements in our own actions, our fate should be something like that of the wooden people in the Popol Vuh. For them, the forgotten force of divinity reasserted itself by inhabiting their own tools and utensils, which rose up against them and drove them from their homes. Today they are swinging through the trees.

On the holy day Eight Monkey
in the year Eleven Thought,
June 22, 1984,
Menotomy, Massachusetts

On the holy day One Hunahpu
in the year Nine Tooth,
July 24, 1995,
East Aurora, New York