

POPOL VUH

Translated by Allen Christenson*

PREAMBLE

THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF THE ANCIENT TRADITIONS of this place called Quiché.

Here we shall gather the manifestation, the declaration, the account of the sowing and the dawning by the **Framer** and the **Shaper**, **She Who Has Borne Children** and **He Who Has Begotten Sons**, as they are called; along with **Hunahpu Possum** and **Hunahpu Coyote**, **Great White Peccary** and **Coati**,¹ **Sovereign** and **Quetzal Serpent**, **Heart of Lake** and **Heart of Sea**, **Creator of the Green Earth** and **Creator of the Blue Sky**, as they are called. ...

Great is its performance and its account of the completion and germination of all the sky and earth—its four corners and its four sides. All then was measured and staked out into four divisions, doubling over and stretching the measuring cords of the womb of sky and the womb of earth.² ...

THE PRIMORDIAL WORLD

...THESE, then, are the first words, the first speech. There is not yet one person, one animal, bird, fish, crab, tree, rock, hollow, canyon, meadow, or forest. All alone the sky exists. The face of the earth has not yet appeared. Alone lies the expanse of the sea, along with the womb of all the sky. There is not yet anything gathered together. All is at rest. Nothing stirs. All is languid, at rest in the sky. There is not yet anything standing erect. Only the expanse of the water, only the tranquil sea lies alone. There is not yet anything that might exist. All lies placid and silent in the darkness, in the night.

All alone are the Framer and the Shaper, Sovereign and Quetzal Serpent, They Who Have Borne Children and They Who Have Begotten Sons. Luminous they are in the water, wrapped in quetzal feathers and cotinga feathers. Thus they are called Quetzal Serpent. In their essence, they are great sages, great possessors of knowledge. ... There is also **Heart of Sky**,

THE CREATION OF THE EARTH (*First Creation*)

THEN came his word. **Heart of Sky** arrived here with Sovereign and Quetzal Serpent in the darkness, in the night. He spoke with Sovereign and Quetzal Serpent. ... Beneath the light, they gave birth to humanity. Then they arranged for the germination and creation ("*peopling*") of the trees and the bushes, the germination of all life and creation, in the darkness and in the night, by **Heart of Sky**, who is called **Huracan** ("*one leg*").

... Then the earth was created by them. Merely their word brought about the creation of it. In order to create the earth, they said, "Earth," and immediately it was created. Just like a cloud, like a mist, was the creation and formation of it.

Then they called forth the mountains from the water. Straightaway the great mountains came to be. ... Straightaway were created cypress groves and pine forests to cover the face of the earth....

First the earth was created, the mountains and the valleys. ... Thus the waters were divided, revealing the great mountains. For thus was the creation of the earth, created then by **Heart of Sky** and **Heart of Earth**, as they are called. They were the first to conceive it. The sky was set apart. The earth also was set apart within the waters. ...

THE CREATION OF THE ANIMALS

THEN were conceived the animals of the mountains, the guardians of the forest, and all that populate the mountains—the deer and the birds, the puma and the jaguar, the serpent and the rattlesnake, the pit viper and the guardian of the bushes.

She Who Has Borne Children and He Who Has Begotten Sons then asked:

"Shall it be merely solitary, merely silent beneath the trees and the bushes? It is well that there shall be guardians for them," they said.

¹ These 8 names /titles are all names of the divine couple, Xmucane and Xpiyacoc. Also (farther along) "Creator of Green Earth and of Blue Sky" and "Midwife and Patriarch," and so on. "Heart of Lake and of Sea" refer to Sovereign & Quetzal Serpent. (*MV: echoes of "Sky God" and "Earth God," and of the presiding "Lord 6-Sky."*)

² The gods thus laid out the extent of their creation by measuring its boundaries, driving stakes to mark its four corners, and stretching a measuring cord between the stakes. (That is,) measuring out the sky and earth as if it were a maizefield being laid out for cultivation (D. Tedlock 1996, 220) (*MV: When a Maya man lays out a maize field or a house, he is re-enacting Creation.*)

... and immediately were created the deer and the birds. Having done this, they then provided homes for the deer and the birds...

THE FALL OF THE ANIMALS

THEN it was said to the deer and the birds by the Framer and the Shaper, She Who Has Borne Children and He Who Has Begotten Sons:

“Speak! Call! Don’t moan or cry out. Speak to one another, each according to your kind, according to your group,” they were told—the deer, the birds, the pumas, the jaguars, and the serpents.

“Speak therefore our names. Worship us, for we are your Mother and your Father. Say this, therefore: ‘Huracan, Youngest Thunderbolt, and Sudden Thunderbolt, Heart of Sky and Heart of Earth, Framer and Shaper, She Who Has Borne Children and He Who Has Begotten Sons.’ Speak! Call upon us! Worship us!” they were told.

But they did not succeed. They did not speak like people. They only squawked and chattered and roared. Their speech was unrecognizable, for each cried out in a different way.

When they heard this, the Framer and the Shaper said, “Their speech did not turn out well.”

And again they said to each other:

“They were not able to speak our names. ...This is not good,” said She Who Has Borne Children and He Who Has Begotten Sons to each other.

They were therefore told:

“You shall be replaced because you were not successful. You could not speak. ... Because you have not been able to worship us or call upon us, there will yet be someone else who may be a worshiper. We shall now make one who will give honor. Your calling will merely be to have your flesh eaten. Thus be it so. ...” Thus were commanded the animals ... The animals that were on the face of the earth were eaten and killed.

THE CREATION OF THE MUD PERSON (*Second Creation*)

THUS there was another attempt to frame and shape man by the Framer and the Shaper, by She Who Has Borne Children and He Who Has Begotten Sons:

“Let us try again before the first sowing, before the dawn approaches. Let us make a provider, a sustainer for us. ...”

... Of earth and mud was its flesh composed. But they saw that it was still not good. It merely came undone and crumbled ... became sodden and mushy... fell apart and dissolved. Its head was not set apart properly. Its face could only look in one direction. Its face was hidden. ... At first it spoke, but without knowledge. Straightaway it would merely dissolve in water,

Then said the Framer and the Shaper: “We have made a mistake; ...”

Therefore they undid it. ...

“We shall merely tell Xpiyacoc and Xmucane, Hunahpu Possum and Hunahpu Coyote, ‘Try again ...’” said the Framer and the Shaper to each other.

THE CREATION OF THE EFFIGIES OF CARVED WOOD (*Third Creation*)

HURACAN, along with Sovereign and Quetzal Serpent, then spoke to the Master of Days and the Mistress of Shaping, they who are seers:

“It shall be found; it shall be discovered how we are to create shaped and framed people who will be our providers and sustainers. ...”

“Reveal your names, Hunahpu Possum and Hunahpu Coyote, Great She Who Has Borne Children and Great He Who Has Begotten Sons, Great Peccary and Great Coati, Jeweler and Worker in Precious Stones, Sculptor and Wood Worker, Creator of the Green Earth and Creator of the Blue Sky, Incense Maker and Master Artist, Grandmother of Day and Grandmother of Light. ... Cast grains of maize and *tz’ite* to divine how what we shall make will come out when we grind and chisel out its mouth and face in wood,” so it was said to the **Masters of Days**.

...Then they spoke straight to the point: “May these effigies of wood come out well. May they speak. May they communicate there upon the face of the earth. May it be so,” they said.

And when they had spoken, straightaway the effigies of carved wood were made. They had the appearance of people and spoke like people as well. They populated the whole face of the earth. The effigies of carved wood began to multiply, bearing daughters and sons.

Nevertheless, they still did not possess their hearts nor their minds. They did not remember their Framer or their Shaper. They walked without purpose. They crawled on their hands and knees and did not remember Heart of Sky. Thus they were weighed in the balance. They were merely an experiment, an attempt at people. At first they spoke, but their faces were all dried up. Their legs and arms were not filled out. They had no blood or blood flow within

them. They had no sweat or oil. Their cheeks were dry, and their faces were masks. Their legs and arms were stiff. Their bodies were rigid. Thus they were not capable of understanding before their Framer and their Shaper, those who had given them birth and given them hearts. They were the first numerous people who have lived here upon the face of the earth.

(At this point the Popol Vuh recounts the deeds of the Hero Twins during the interval between the past and the present Creation. [The 7-Macaw story may technically have occurred during the end of the third Creation...] For the sake of continuity, I insert the description of the final Creation here, and append the intervening Hero Twins events below.)

THE CREATION OF HUMANITY (Fourth and present Creation)

Then spoke they ...: "The dawn approaches, and our work is not successfully completed. A provider and a sustainer have yet to appear—a child of light, a son of light. Humanity has yet to appear to populate the face of the earth," they said.

... They discovered and established that which would become the flesh of humanity. This took place just a little before the appearance of the sun, moon, and stars above the heads of the Framer and the Shaper.

THE DISCOVERY OF MAIZE

IT was from within the places called Paxil and Cayala that the yellow ears of ripe maize and the white ears of ripe maize came.

... Thus was found the food that would become the flesh of the newly framed and shaped people. Water was their blood. ...

... They rejoiced over the discovery of that excellent mountain that was filled with delicious things, crowded with yellow ears of maize and white ears of maize,... with *pataxte* and chocolate, with countless *zapotes* and *anonas*, with *jocotes* and *nances*, with *matasanos* and honey. ...

The yellow ears of maize and the white ears of maize were then ground fine with nine grindings (*cf: nine months*) by Xmucane. Food entered their flesh, along with water to give them strength. Thus was created the fatness of their arms. The yellowness (= *preciousness*) of humanity came to be ...

Thus their frame and shape were given expression by our first Mother and our first Father. Their flesh was merely yellow ears of maize and white ears of maize....³

THE FIRST FOUR MEN

...The first person was Balam Quitze, the second was Balam Acab, the third was Mahucutah and the fourth was Iqui Balam. These, then, were the names of our first mothers and fathers.

THE MIRACULOUS VISION OF THE FIRST MEN

They had no mother. They had no father. ...Their frame and shape were merely brought about by the miraculous power and the spirit essence of the Framer and the Shaper, of She Who Has Borne Children and He Who Has Begotten Sons, of Sovereign and Quetzal Serpent.

People they came to be. They were able to speak and converse. They were able to look and listen. They were able to walk and hold things with their hands. They were excellent and chosen people. Their faces were manly in appearance. ...They were able to see as well, for straightaway their vision came to them.

... Perfect was their sight, and perfect was their knowledge of everything beneath the sky. If they gazed about them, looking intently, they beheld that which was in the sky and that which was upon the earth. Instantly they were able to behold everything. They did not have to walk to see all that existed beneath the sky. They merely saw it from wherever they were. ... Their vision passed beyond the trees and the rocks, beyond the lakes and the seas, beyond the mountains and the valleys. Truly they were very esteemed people, ...

THE GRATITUDE OF THE FIRST MEN

... They gave thanks to the Framer and the Shaper:

"Truly we thank you doubly, triply that we were created, that we were given our mouths and our faces. We are able to speak and to listen. We are able to ponder and to move about. We know much, for we have learned that which is far and near. We have seen the great and the small, all that exists in the sky and on the earth. We thank you, therefore, that we were created, that we were given frame and shape. We became because of you, our Grandmother, and you, our Grandfather," they said

³ (MV: When a Maya woman rises before the sun and grinds corn in the dim light, she is re-enacting Creation.)

Their knowledge of everything that they saw was complete—the four corners and the four sides, that which is within the sky and that which is within the earth.

But this did not sound good to the Framer and the Shaper:

“It is not good what they have said, ... ‘We have learned everything, great and small.’”

THE DISPLEASURE OF THE GODS

THUS their knowledge was taken back by She Who Has Borne Children and He Who Has Begotten Sons:

“What now can be done to them so that their vision reaches only nearby, so that only a little of the face of the earth can be seen by them? For it is not good what they say. ...It is a mistake that they have become like gods.

“But if they do not multiply or are increased, when will the first planting be? When will it dawn? If they do not increase, when will it be so? **Therefore we will merely undo them a little now.** ... Thus they remade the essence of that which they had framed and shaped.

THE CREATION OF THE MOTHERS OF THE QUICHÉ NATION

THEIR eyes were merely blurred by Heart of Sky. They were blinded like breath upon the face of a mirror. ... They could see only nearby; things were clear to them only where they were. Thus their knowledge was lost. The wisdom of the first four people was lost there at their foundation, at their beginning. ...

Then their companions, their wives, also came to be. ... The women were truly beautiful Thus when the men were brought to life, their wives truly came to be as well. At once their hearts rejoiced because of their mates.

These... are the names of their wives: Cahapaluna was the name of the wife of Balam Quitze. Chomiha was the name of the wife of Balam Acab. Tzununiha was the name of the wife of Mahucutah. Caquixaha was the name of the wife of Iqui Balam. ...

This, therefore, was our foundation, we the Quiché people. There were many who came to be bloodletters⁴ and sacrificers.⁵ There are no longer merely four now, Truly these became the names of the people—Sovereign, Ballplayer, Masker, and Sun Lord. ...

(a long list of nations and lineages...)

Of these we shall speak only of the nations that became great among the allied nations. They who became great we shall declare. There were many others that came out of the citadel after them, each one of them a division. We have not written their names, but they also multiplied there in the East. Many people arrived in darkness in the days of their increase, for the sun was yet to be born. ... They would merely lift up their faces to the sky, for they did not know where to go.

This they did for a long time there among the magueys; among the black people and the white people, the people of many appearances and many tongues. They were destitute in their existence at the **edge of the sky's** foundation. And there were mountain people. They were hidden, and without homes. ...It is as if they were lacking in direction, as they used to say. ...

There they looked for the coming forth of the sun, when they had one common language. They did not yet call upon wood or stone (*i.e., carve monuments*). They remembered the word of the Framer and the Shaper, of Heart of Sky and Heart of Earth, it was said. They would merely plead for their heartening, their sowing and their dawning. These were people of esteemed words, of esteem, of honor, and of respect. ...

THE APPEARANCE OF THE FIRST DAWN

THIS therefore is the dawn, the appearance of the sun, moon, and stars.

GREATLY they rejoiced, Balam Quitze, Balam Acab, Mahucutah, and Iqui Balam, when they saw the Morning Star. It came forth glittering before the face of the sun.

Then they unwrapped their copal incense, for the sun was to come forth. ... There were three types of incense that they burned as a means of expressing the gratitude in their hearts:

Mixtam Incense was the name of the copal incense carried by Balam Quitze.

Caviztan Incense was the name of the copal incense carried by Balam Acab.

And *Cabavil* Incense, as it is called, was carried by Mahucutah.

... And when the sun came forth, all the small animals and great animals rejoiced. They came up from the rivers and from the canyons. They were there on the mountain peak. As one they turned their faces toward the coming forth of the sun. Then the pumas and the jaguars cried out. The first bird to sing was the parrot, as it is called. ... The eagles and the white vultures, all the small and great birds, spread their wings.

⁴ *Aj k'ixb'* may literally be translated as “he of the spines”... .

⁵ *Aj k'ajb'* (sacrificers). *K'ajb'* is specifically blood sacrifice.

The bloodletters and sacrificers were kneeling. ... However many nations there are today, innumerable people, they all had but one dawn.

... Like a person was the sun when he revealed himself. Hot was his face and thus he dried the surface of the earth. Before the sun had come forth the face of the earth was wet; it was soggy prior to the coming forth of the sun. ... His heat could not be endured. This was but his self-revelation when he was born. What is left is but a mirror. What appears now is not the true sun, according to their account.

(I have omitted the next chapters, which vaguely parallel the rest of the Book of Genesis, describing the rise of the Quiché nation and its odyssey up to historical times....)

(Now, here, the in-between-Creations account of the Hero Twins and their Father and Uncle, preparing the way for our Creation.)

THE PRIDE OF SEVEN MACAW BEFORE THE DAWN

... He therefore declared himself to be the bright sign for those who were drowned in the flood.⁶ ...

...

THIS is the beginning of his defeat. This is the shaking of the day of Seven Macaw by the twins, named Hunahpu⁷ and Xbalanque.⁸

THE DEFEAT OF SEVEN MACAW

This is Seven Macaw and a great nance tree.⁹ ... there ... he was seen by Hunahpu and Xbalanque.

The twins watched for him beneath the tree, hidden in its leaves. ... Hunahpu directed a pellet straight from his blowgun into his jaw. Seven Macaw cried out, sailing over the top of the tree and landing on the ground.

...Quickly, Hunahpu ran out to grab him. But instead Seven Macaw tore off the arm of Hunahpu. He wrenched it back, bending it back at the shoulder until it was torn free from Hunahpu.

...Thus the wealth of Seven Macaw was lost, for the healers took it away—the jewels, the precious stones, and all that which had made him proud here upon the face of the earth.¹⁰ It was truly the enchanted Grandmother and the enchanted Grandfather that did it. Then the boys retrieved their arm and implanted it back into its socket, making it whole again. ...

THE DEEDS OF ZIPACNA AND THE FOUR HUNDRED BOYS

⁶ The account of Seven Macaw is set at the time prior to the flood that destroyed the wooden effigies, as described in the previous section...

⁷ (MV: I have left the next two footnotes intact, to give you an idea of Christenson's thoroughness in explaining this rather arcane text. They are notes 163 and 164 in his original translation.) Here we are introduced for the first time to the twin heroes, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, who will be the central focus of much of the remainder of the mythological portions of the *Popol Vuh*. Hunahpu has generally been translated in the past as "One Master of the Blowgun" or "One Blowgun Hunter" on the assumption that *pu* is a shortened version of [*p]ub'* (blowgun). This may well be the original etymology of the name. In this section of the text, Hunahpu is described as a great blowgun hunter. On the other hand, the authors of the *Popol Vuh* text consistently wrote the word for blowgun as *ub'* or *wub'*, not *pu*. It is therefore unlikely that the Quiché authors of the text had "blowgun" in mind when they wrote the name of this deity. If the Quiché scribes had meant to make it clear that he was a "blowgunner," they would have used the word currently in use at the time. I believe that they remembered the name as it was handed down to them over the generations and simply preserved the archaic spelling because that was simply his proper name. Hunahpu is treated as a single proper name elsewhere in the text, much like Taylor and Cooper are used as family names without necessarily calling to mind the professions of clothier or barrel maker. The father of the culture hero Hunahpu is named Hun Hunahpu, which if translated literally would mean "One One Master of the Blowgun," a needlessly redundant reading unless Hunahpu were meant to be read as a single untranslated name. Schele and Mathews have proposed an alternative reading based on a Cholan-Maya language etymology, the language of the Classic Maya (ca. AD 250-900) that dominated the lowland region from Palenque and Calakmul as far south as Copan (Schele and Mathews 1998, 74, 295). Inscriptions from this period refer to the Central Mexican city of **Teotihuacan** as **Puh** (Place of Cattail Reeds). This is the Maya language version of *Tollan* (Nahuatl for "Place of Cattail Reeds), the legendary founding place of the arts and sciences, as well as of political power and legitimacy. This title was given to a number of major centers, including Teotihuacan, Cholula, Chichen Itza, and Tenochtitlan. It is likely that the concept is even older, dating to Olmec traditions in the southern Gulf Coast region, tied to legends of the birth of the world from the primordial sea. The reeds represent the first life to emerge from this place of origin (Schele and Mathews 1998, 200). If *Hunahpu* is related to this concept, the title could be interpreted as "One/First He of the Place of Cattail Reeds," meaning that the deity pertains to the legendary founding place of Mesoamerican civilization, or the place of original creation. **Hunahpu is also one of the named days of the 260-day sacred calendar** still used by the Quichés. This day is associated with the underworld realm of the dead and with rebirth from that realm. I have chosen to leave the name untranslated, as it is used in this context as a proper name, rather than a descriptive term.

⁸ The derivation of the name Xbalanque is problematic. The prefix *x-* is a diminutive as well as a feminine indicator. Thus, depending on the context, it may mean "young, small, little," or it may be used as a female title, such as "lady." (MV: *Could X be an abbreviation of "Yax" from his Classic name Yax Balam?*) The latter usage has led to some speculation that Xbalanque may have been the twin sister of Hunahpu, acting as the female counterpart to the male powers of the hunter. This theory is not supported by the text, however, which consistently refers to the twins as "sons" or "boys." Hunahpu himself often carries the *x-* prefix, although not as consistently as his brother (see lines 4307, 4550, 4576, 4586, 4646, 4725). *B'alan* is undoubtedly an archaic spelling of *b'alam* (jaguar), m/n letter substitutions being fairly common in Quiché. Indeed, Vico transcribed the name in his *Theologia Indorum* as Xbalamquej (Carmack and Morales Santos 1983, 6-8). Known for its ferocity and cunning, the jaguar is the largest predator in Mesoamerica. Rulers decorated their thrones with jaguar symbols and wore jaguar pelts to emphasize lordly power. In addition, the jaguar is associated with ritual powers of transformation and prophecy. The terminal *ke* is more difficult to interpret. The most likely derivations are *kej* (deer) or *q'ij* (sun or day). The latter possibility is intriguing. The Maya closely identified the jaguar with the sun, particularly in its journey through the underworld at night. The story of Xbalanque and his brother focuses on their passage through the underworld, where they defeat the lords of death, ultimately to become the apotheosed sun and moon in the sky. Father Bartolomé de las Casas was told in the sixteenth century that Xbalanquen was a god from the area of the Guatemalan Alta Verapaz who made war with the lords of hell and returned as a great ruler (Las Casas 1958, 427). The word for sun in the Kekchi-Maya dialect of the Alta Verapaz region is *q'e*, and Xbalamq'e is still remembered by the Kekchi as a sun god (D. Tedlock 1996, 239 n. 77). If this name is purely of Kekchi origin, Balamq'e may be read in that language as "hidden sun, or the night sun" (Ibid.). The most likely translation of the name would therefore be "Young Hidden/Jaguar Sun."

⁹ Here, the author's use of the demonstrative pronoun "This..." implies that he was dictating to a scribe, reading from an illustrated (and perhaps hieroglyphic) manuscript.

¹⁰ The *Popol Vuh* makes it clear that the power and authority of Seven Macaw were based on his wealth rather than his own abilities. When his riches were taken away, he was susceptible to defeat.

... All the boys became drunk. All four hundred boys thus were drunk and didn't feel anything when Zipacna collapsed their hut down upon their heads. As a result, all of them were finished, struck down every one of them. ...

Such was the death of these four hundred boys at the hands of Zipacna, the son of Seven Macaw. It is said that they became the constellation known as the **Pleiades**, but perhaps this is merely a fable.

THE DEFEAT OF ZIPACNA

...He was defeated by the twins, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, whose hearts were offended by the deaths of the four hundred boys

Now we shall tell of the birth of Hunahpu and Xbalanque,...

THE TALE OF ONE HUNAHPU, THE FATHER OF HUNAHPU AND XBALANQUE... THE DEEDS OF ONE HUNAHPU AND SEVEN HUNAHPU ABOVE XIBALBA

...It was in the darkness, in the night, when **One Hunahpu** and **Seven Hunahpu** were born to Xpiyacoc and Xmucane. Now this One Hunahpu had two children...: **One Batz** his firstborn, and **One Chouen** his secondborn. Their mother was Xbaquiyalo.

Seven Hunahpu had no wife. He ...was like a servant to One Hunahpu. They were great thinkers, for great was their knowledge. They were seers here upon the face of the earth. They were good by their nature, and in their birth

They revealed (taught) their talents.... **One Batz** and **One Chouen** became flautists and singers, writers and sculptors, jade workers and precious metalsmiths....

Now it was on the path leading to Xibalba where they played ball. Thus the lords of Xibalba, One Death and Seven Death heard them: "... They have simply failed to honor us. They have neither honor nor respect. ..."

These, therefore, were the great judges, Each was given his task and his dominion by **One Death** and **Seven Death**¹¹: ...

These are the lords named **Flying Scab** and **Gathered Blood**.

These, then, are the lords **Pus Demon** and **Jaundice Demon**.

These, then, are the lords **Bone Staff** and **Skull Staff**, the staff bearers of Xibalba.

These, then, are the lords whose names are **Sweepings Demon** and **Stabbings Demon**.

These, then, are they whose names are **Lord Wing** and **Packstrap**.

... For the Xibalbans desired the gaming things of One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu—their leathers, their yokes, their arm protectors, their headdresses, and their face masks.

THE SUMMONS OF ONE HUNAHPU AND SEVEN HUNAHPU TO XIBALBA

... These messengers were the owls—**Arrow Owl**, **One Leg Owl**, **Macaw Owl**, and **Skull Owl**—for so the messengers of Xibalba were called. ...

At length they arrived at a crossroads, and it was here at the four crossing roads that they were defeated. One was **Red Road** and another was **Black Road**; **White Road** was one while another was **Yellow Road**.

Then they arrived at **Blood River**. They were able to pass through it because they did not drink from it.

Then they arrived at **Pus River**.

"Me! Take me, for I am the lord's road." *Thus spoke the Black road.*

... Xibalba is crowded with trials, for there are many kinds of trials there.

...The first of these is the House of Darkness,

The second is named Shivering House, its interior thick with frost.

The third is named Jaguar House

The fourth trial is named Bat House

The fifth, then, is named Blade House....

Thus there are many trials in Xibalba. One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu did not enter into them. ... They were sacrificed and buried... at the place named Crushing Ballcourt....

... "Place his head in the midst of the tree that is planted by the road," said One Death and Seven Death.

¹¹ Most of these names with numerical coefficients are days in the *Tzolk'in*. These supernatural personalities attach to the days themselves as auguries. Many Mesoamerican nations named their children for the *Tzolk'in* date of their birth; but if the date had an evil augury, they delayed baptism till a better day.

Now when they went to place his head in the midst of the tree, the tree bore fruit. The tree had never borne fruit until the head of One Hunahpu was placed in it. This was the tree that we now call the calabash. ...

THE MAIDEN LADY BLOOD AND THE TREE OF ONE HUNAHPU

A MAIDEN, the daughter of lord Gathered Blood, had heard of it. ...

...“Very well then, stretch out hither your right hand so that I may see it,” said the skull. ... And so she stretched upward her right hand before the face of the skull. Then the skull squeezed out some of its saliva, directed toward the hand of the maiden.

“My saliva, my spittle, is merely a sign that I have given to you. This head of mine no longer functions, for it is merely a skull that cannot work. ... Straightaway her children were created in her womb by the mere saliva. Thus was the creation of **Hunahpu** and **Xbalanque**.

THE ASCENT OF LADY BLOOD FROM XIBALBA

...“Sacrifice her, you war councilors,” the four owls were told. “Then bring back her heart inside a bowl so that the lords may examine it this day.”

And so they went, carrying the bowl and lifting up the maiden in their talons. They took with them the **White Dagger**, the instrument of her sacrifice.

“...this that is in my womb was merely created and is not the result of fornication. ... do not sacrifice me, you messengers,” said the maiden...

“But what shall we give as a substitute for your heart? For we were told by your father, ‘Bring hither her heart ... , what will we put in the bowl? ...’” said the messengers.

... The red tree... oozed forth the substitute for her heart. The sap of the red tree was ... the substitute for her blood.

The ...Xibalbans savored its fragrance. They all rose up to lean over it, for truly delicious was the smell of the blood to them.... the owls went to guide the maiden up to the hole leading above the earth. ...

HUNAHPU AND XBALANQUE IN THE HOUSE OF THE GRANDMOTHER

...Now One Batz and One Chouen were great flautists and singers. They had grown in greatness. ...They were sages. They ...had also become writers and carvers. Everything they did was successful for them.

But nothing ever came of these enchanted abilities because of their envy. The abuses born in their hearts merely fell upon their own backs and nothing came of them.

When meals were prepared for Hunahpu and Xbalanque, One Batz and One Chouen would eat it all before they returned. ...

“...Our birds are just stuck up in the top of the tree,” (Hunahpu and Xbalanque) said. “... We would like our older brothers to go with us to bring down the birds,” they said.

...Thus they went there below the tree whose name is Yellow Tree, in company with their older brothers. As they went, they began to shoot with their blowguns, ...but not one of these birds that they saw fell down beneath the tree...

“... Just go and bring them down,” they said to their older brothers. ...

And they climbed up to the top of the tree. But the tree began to grow larger. ... When they wanted to come back down, One Batz and One Chouen couldn’t climb down They appeared just like spider monkeys. ...They went out into the forests, howling and chattering loudly in the branches of the trees.

Thus was the defeat of One Batz and One Chouen at the hands of Hunahpu and Xbalanque. ... they remained out in the forest ... And since that time they have been called upon by the flautists and the singers. The ancient ones also called upon them, they who were the writers and the carvers. ...

HUNAHPU AND XBALANQUE DISCOVER THE GAMING THINGS

...Then the rat clawed at the ropes that held the rubber ball from the thatch roof above the house until it fell, along with the yokes, the arm protectors, and the leathers. They carried them away and hid them along the road leading to the ballcourt.

THE SUMMONS OF HUNAHPU AND XBALANQUE TO XIBALBA

... Then the lords of Xibalba heard it:

“Someone has begun to play again over our heads. Have they no shame, stomping about up there? Did not One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu die when they desired to puff themselves up before us? Go then to summon them here once again,” said One Death and Seven Death, along with all the lords. ...

THE DESCENT OF HUNAHPU AND XBALANQUE INTO XIBALBA

“SURELY we must go, our grandmother. ...This is the sign of our word that we will leave behind. Each of us shall first plant an ear of unripe maize in the center of the house. If they dry up, this is a sign of our death. ...If then they sprout again, ‘They are alive,’ you will say, our grandmother and our mother. ...

...They hailed each one of them:

“Morning, One Death. Morning, Seven Death.
Morning, Flying Scab. Morning, Gathered Blood.
Morning, Pus Demon. Morning, Jaundice Demon.
Morning, Bone Staff. Morning, Skull Staff.
Morning, Wing. Morning, Packstrap.
Morning, Bloody Teeth. Morning, Bloody Claws,”

they said when they arrived there. ...

THE DEATHS OF HUNAHPU AND XBALANQUE

... Then they turned to face one another, spread out their arms and together they went into the pit oven. Thus both of them died there. ...

THE RESURRECTION OF HUNAHPU AND XBALANQUE

ON the fifth day they appeared again. People saw them in the river, for the two of them appeared like people-fish. ... (*then as poor orphans*)

... they did the Dance of the Whippoorwill and the Dance of the Weasel. They danced the Armadillo and the Centipede. They danced the Injury, for many marvels they did then. They set fire to a house as if it were truly burning, then immediately recreated it again as the Xibalbans watched with admiration.

Then again they sacrificed themselves. One of them would die, Then having been killed, he would immediately be revived. ...

HUNAHPU AND XBALANQUE DANCE BEFORE THE LORDS OF XIBALBA

“Do not be afraid or timid. Dance! First you will do that dance in which you sacrifice yourselves. Then burn down my home. Do everything that you know. We would watch this, for it was the desire of our hearts that you be summoned. ...

So they sacrificed his dog and then revived him once more. The dog was truly happy when they revived him. He vigorously wagged his tail when they brought him back to life. ...

“Now you must surely burn my home,”

So then they burned the home of the lord. The house was overflowing with all the lords, yet none were burned. Immediately it was restored again. Thus the home of One Death was not lost after all. ...

“Now kill a person. Sacrifice him, but not so that he really dies,” they were told. ...

So they grabbed a person and sacrificed him. They extracted the heart of one of them and placed it before the lords. Now One Death and Seven Death marveled at this, for immediately that person was revived again by them. When he had been revived, his heart greatly rejoiced. And again the lords marveled at it. ...

“Now sacrifice yourselves. ... Truly it is the desire of our hearts that you dance,” said again the lords. ...

So then they sacrificed themselves. Hunahpu was sacrificed by Xbalanque. Each of his legs and arms was severed. His head was cut off and placed far away. His heart was dug out and placed on a leaf. Now all these lords of Xibalba were drunk at the sight, as Xbalanque went on dancing.

“Arise!” he said, and immediately he was brought back to life again. Now the lords rejoiced greatly. One Death and Seven Death rejoiced as if they were the ones doing it. ...

THE DEFEAT OF THE LORDS OF XIBALBA

... Then came the words of One Death and Seven Death: “Do it to us! Sacrifice us! ...Sacrifice us in the same way,” ...

The first to be sacrificed was the very head of all the lords, One Death..., the lord of Xibalba. He was dead then, this One Death. Next they grabbed Seven Death. But they didn’t revive them. ...Their hearts were now taken from their chests. ...

... The lords of Xibalba were defeated. ... The boys had transformed themselves before them. And then they ... revealed their names before all Xibalba.

THE MIRACULOUS MAIZE OF HUNAHPU AND XBALANQUE

“... Our fathers are they whom you killed, One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu by name. We are the avengers of the misfortune and affliction of our fathers. For this reason, ... We will kill you...,” they were told.

“... Hearken all you of Xibalba; for never again will you or your posterity (or) your offerings ...be great. They will henceforth be reduced to croton sap. No longer will clean blood be yours. Unto you will be given only worn-out griddles and pots,¹² only flimsy and brittle things.

“You shall surely eat only the creatures of the grass and the creatures of the wastelands. No longer will you be given the children of the light, those begotten in the light. Only things of no importance will fall before you. ... Only the sinner and the malevolent, the wretch and the molester ..., will be given to you. No longer will you be able to seize suddenly just any person...,” they were told, all they of Xibalba.

Never again would their dominion become great. This was the accomplishment of Hunahpu and Xbalanque.

Now at the same time, ... The heart of their grandmother rejoiced when the maize sprouted a second time.

Thus they were deified by their grandmother. ...

Now their fathers, One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu, had died long ago. They now went, therefore, to see the face of their father there at Xibalba. Their father spoke to them when Xibalba was defeated.

THE APOTHEOSIS OF THE SUN, MOON, AND STARS

HERE now is the adornment of their father by (the Hero Twins), along with the adornment of Seven Hunahpu. ...the heart of their father was left behind at Crushing Ballcourt. His sons then said to him: “Here you will be called upon. It shall be so.”...

“We are merely the avengers of your death and your loss, for the affliction and misfortune that were done to you.” Thus was their counsel when they had defeated all Xibalba.

Then they (*presumably One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu, the first Twins*) arose as the central lights. They arose straight into the sky. One of them arose as the sun, and the other as the moon. Thus the womb of the sky was illuminated over the face of the earth, for they came to dwell in the sky.

The four hundred boys who had died at the hands of Zipacna also rose up to become their companions. They became a constellation of the sky.

(This extract from Allen Christenson's translation of the Popol Vuh, initially prepared by Mark Van Stone for "It's not the End of the World," a lecture on Maya culture and 2012 presented in Santa Fe on 30 May 2008. *[Christenson, Allen, trans. & ed., Popol Vuh. BYU Studies/FARMS, Provo, Utah, 2000])*

¹² At the end of each ritual year, broken bits of pottery are left at shrines to symbolize the passing of one age to another. New pots and utensils represent a new beginning and an opportunity for a fresh start in life.