

PART I: Chapter 1

THIS IS THE ACCOUNT OF HOW ALL WAS in suspense, all calm, in silence; all motionless, still, and the expanse of the sky was empty.

This is the first account, the first narrative. There was neither man, nor animal, birds, fishes, crabs, trees, stones, caves, ravines, grasses, nor forests; there was only the sky.

The surface of the earth had not appeared. There was only the calm sea and the great expanse of the sky.

There was nothing brought together, nothing which could make a noise, nor anything which might move, or tremble, or could make noise in the sky.

There was nothing standing; only the calm water, the placid sea, alone and tranquil. Nothing existed.

There was only immobility and silence in the darkness.

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IC-PA GWA-KWA-MATS

in the night. Only the creator, the Maker, Tepeu, Gucumatz, the Forefathers, 1 were in the water surrounded with light. 2 They were hidden under green and blue feathers, and were therefore called Gucumatz. 3 By nature they were great sages and great thinkers. 4 In this manner the sky existed and also the Heart of Heaven, which is the name of God and thus He is called.

Then came the word. Tepeu and Gucumatz came together in the darkness, in the night, and Tepeu and Gucumatz talked together. 5 They talked then, discussing and deliberating; they agreed, they united their words and their thoughts.

Then while they meditated, it became clear to them that when dawn would break, man must appear. 6 Then they planned the creation, and the growth of the trees and the thickets and the birth of life and the creation of man. Thus it was arranged in the darkness and in the night by the Heart of Heaven who is called Huracán.

The first is called Caculhá Huracán. The second is Chipi-Caculhá. The third is Raxa-Caculhá. And these three are the Heart of Heaven. 7

Then Tepeu and Gucumatz came together; then they conferred about life and light, what they would do so that there would be light and dawn, 8 who it would be who would provide food and sustenance.

Thus let it be done! Let the emptiness be filled! 9 Let the water recede and make a void, let the earth appear and become solid; let it be done. Thus they spoke. Let there be light, let there be dawn in the sky and on the earth! There shall be neither glory nor grandeur in our creation and formation until the human being is made, man is formed. So they spoke.

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Then the earth was created by them. So it was, in truth, that they created the earth. Earth! they said, and instantly it was made.



Diego Rivera (1886-1957)
The Creation [Illustration for Popol Vuh], ca. 1931

Like the mist, like a cloud, and like a cloud of dust was the creation, when the mountains appeared from the water; 10 and instantly the mountains grew.

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Only by a miracle, only by magic art were the mountains and valleys formed; and instantly the groves of cypresses and pines put forth shoots together on the surface of the earth. 11

And thus Gucumatz was filled with joy, and exclaimed: "Your coming has been fruitful, Heart of Heaven; and you, Huracán, and you, Chipi-Caculhá, Raxa-Caculhá!"

"Our work, our creation shall be finished," they answered.

First the earth was formed, the mountains and the valleys; the currents of water were divided, the rivulets were running freely between the hills, and the water was separated when the high mountains appeared.

Thus was the earth created, when it was formed by the Heart of Heaven, the Heart of Earth, as they are called who first made it fruitful, when the sky was in suspense, and the earth was submerged in the water.

So it was that they made perfect the work, when they did it after thinking and meditating upon it.

Footnotes

6:1 p. 199 *E Alom*, literally, those who conceive and give birth, *e Qaholom*, those who beget the children. In order to follow the conciseness of the text here I translate the two terms as the "Forefathers."

6:2 They were in the water because the Quiché associated the name Gucumatz with the liquid element. Bishop Núñez de la Vega says that Gucumatz is a serpent with feathers, which moves in the water. The Cakchiquel Manuscript says that one of the primitive peoples which migrated to Guatemala was called Gucumatz because their salvation was in the water.

6:3 *E qo vi e mucutal pa guc pa raxón.* Guc or *q'uc*, *kuk* in Maya, is the bird now called quetzal (*Pharomacrus mocinno*); the same name is given to the beautiful green feathers which cover this bird's tail; in Náhuatl they are called *quetzalli*. *Raxón*, or *raxom*, is another bird with sky-blue plumage, according to Basseta; it is a bird with "chestnut-colored breast and blue wings," according to the *Vocabulario de los Padres Franciscanos*. In the common native language of Guatemala it is called *ranchón*, the *Cotinga amabilis*, a turquoise blue bird with purple breast and throat, which the Mexicans call *Xiuhtotl*. The feathers of these tropical birds, which abound especially in the region of Verapaz, were worn as decorations in the ceremonials by the kings and noblemen from the most ancient Maya times.

6:4 *E nimac etamanel, e nimac ahnaoh*, in the original.

6:5 *X chau ruq ri Tepeu, Gucumatz.* Here the word *ruq* indicates the reciprocal form of the verb.

6:6 *Ta x-calah puch vinac.* With the conciseness of the Quiché language, the author says how the idea was clearly born in the minds of the Makers, how the necessity for creating man, the ultimate and supreme being of the creation, was revealed to them, according to the philosophy of the Quiché. Brasseur de Bourbourg interprets this phrase as follows: "*et au moment de l'aurore, l'homme se manifesta.*" This interpretation is erroneous; the idea of creating man was conceived then, but as will be seen farther on in the account, it was not actually carried out until a much later time.

6:7 *Huracán*, a leg; *Caculhá Huracán*, flash of a leg or the lightning; *Chipi-Caculhá*, p. 200 small flash. This is Ximénez' interpretation. The third, *Raxa-Caculhá*, is the green flash, according to the same author; and, according to Brasseur de Bourbourg, it is the lightning or thunder. The adjective *rax* has, among other meanings, that of "sudden" or "instantly." In Cakchiquel *Rax-haná-hih* is lightning. Nevertheless, despite all this, in both Quiché and Cakchiquel, *racan* means "large" or "long." According to Father Coto, it means a long thing, rope, etc. And also giant (*hu racán*), "a name which applies to every animal which is larger than others of its species," Father Coto adds. These ideas agree with the form of the flash and the lightning as it is drawn in the sky. The Caribs of the West Indies adopted the name *huracán* to designate other natural phenomena equally destructive, and the word was later incorporated into modern languages. See Brinton, *Essays of an Americanist*.

6:8 *Hupachá ta ch'auax-oc, ta zaquiró puch.* Here and in other places in this book, Ximénez and Brasseur de Bourbourg confuse the form of the Quiché verb *auax*, *auaxic*, which corresponds to the verb and substantive "dawn," with *auan*, "plant," and *aux*, the "cornfield." The Maya language has the word *ahalcab* which means "dawn," "break of day," and *ahan cab*, "it has already dawned," from *ahal*, "awaken." In olden times the two verbs "to sow" and "to dawn" were also very similar in Maya. According to the *Diccionario de la lengua maya* by José Pío Pérez, *oc cah* is to sow grain or seed, and *ah cah cab*, to dawn, to make light. It is curious to observe that the Maya cognate was preserved in the ancient Quiché; and it seems probable that these analogous forms in the Maya and the Quiché had a common root.

6:9 *Qu'yx nohin-tah.*

6:10 *X-ta pe pa ha ri huyub*, the mountains came, or emerged from the water. The similarity of the words *x-ta pe* with *tap*, "crab," suggested to Ximénez the comparison of the mountains with the crab. Brasseur de Bourbourg followed him in this. Nevertheless, the sentence could not be clearer.

6:11 *Xaqui naual, xaqui puz x-banatah vi.* The expression *puz naual* is used to indicate the magic power to create or transform one thing into another. *Puz naual haleb*, says Father Barela, was the sorcery used by the Indians to transform themselves into balls of fire, eagles, and animals.

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Then they made the small wild animals, the guardians of the woods, the spirits of the mountains, 1 the deer, the birds, pumas, jaguars, serpents, snakes, vipers, guardians of the thickets.

And the Forefathers asked: 'Shall there be only silence and calm under the trees, under the vines? It is well that hereafter there be someone to guard them.'

So they said when they meditated and talked. Promptly the deer and the birds were created, immediately they gave homes to the deer and the birds. "You, deer, shall sleep in the fields by the river bank and in the ravines. Here you shall be amongst the thicket, amongst the pasture, in the woods you shall multiply, you shall walk on four feet and they will support you. Thus be it done!" So it was they spoke.

Then they also assigned homes to the birds big and small. "You shall live in the trees and in the vines. There you shall make your nests; there you shall multiply; there you shall increase in the branches of the trees and in the vines." Thus the deer and the birds were told; they did their duty at once, and all sought their homes and their nests.

And the creation of all the four-footed animals and the birds being finished, they were told by the Creator and the

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[paragraph continues] Maker and the Forefathers: "Speak, cry, warble, call, speak each one according to your variety, each, according to your kind." So was it said to the deer, the birds, pumas, jaguars, and serpents.

"Speak, then, our names, praise us, your mother, your father. Invoke then, Huracán, Chipi-Caculhá, Raxa-Caculhá, the Heart of Heaven, the Heart of Earth, the Creator, the Maker, the Forefathers; speak, invoke us, adore us," they were told.

But they could not make them speak like men; they only hissed and screamed and cackled; they were unable to make words, and each screamed in a different way.

When the Creator and the Maker saw that it was impossible for them to talk to each other, they said: "It is impossible for them to say our names, the names of us, their Creators and Makers. This is not well," said the Forefathers to each other.

Then they said to them: "Because it has not been possible for you to talk, you shall be changed. We have changed our minds: Your food, your pasture, your homes, and your nests you shall have; they shall be the ravines and the woods, because it has not been possible for you to adore us or invoke us. There shall be those who adore us, we shall make other [beings] who shall be obedient. Accept your destiny: your flesh shall be tom to pieces. So shall it be. This shall be your lot." So they said, when they made known their will to the large and small animals which are on the face of the earth.

They wished to give them another trial; 2 they, wished to make another attempt; they wished to make [all living things] adore them.

But they could not understand each other's speech; they

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could succeed in nothing, and could do nothing. For this reason they were sacrificed and the animals which were on earth were condemned to be killed and eaten.

For this reason another attempt had to be made to create and make men by the Creator, the Maker, and the Forefathers.

"Let us try again! Already dawn draws near: 3 Let us make him who shall nourish and sustain us! What shall we do to be invoked, in order to be remembered on earth? We have already tried with our first creations, our first creatures; but we could not make them praise and venerate us. 4 So, then, let us try to make obedient, respectful beings who will nourish and sustain us." Thus they spoke.

Then was the creation and the formation. Of earth, of mud, they made [man's] flesh. But they saw that it was not good. It melted away, it was soft, did not move, had no strength, it fell down, it was limp, it could not move its head, its face fell to one side, its sight was blurred, 5 it could not look behind. At first it spoke, but had no mind. Quickly it soaked in the water and could not stand.

And the Creator and the Maker said: 6 "Let us try again because our creatures will not be able to walk nor multiply. Let us consider this," they said.

Then they broke up and destroyed their work and their creation. And they said: "What shall we do to perfect it, in

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order that our worshipers, our invokers, will be successful?"

Thus they spoke when they conferred again: "Let us say again to Xpiyacoc, Xmucané, Hunahpú-Vuch, Hunahpú-Utiú: 'Cast your lot again. Try to create again.'" In this manner the Creator and the Maker spoke to Xpiyacoc and Xmucané.

SHpE-YA-kok, SHMO-kane, WAN-ah-pwa -
WAN-ah-pwa - ~~was~~ ootee oo

Then they spoke to those soothsayers, the Grandmother of the day, the Grandmother of the Dawn, 7 as they were called by the Creator and the Maker, and whose names were Xpiyacoc and Xmucané.

And said Huracán, Tepeu, and Gucumatz when they spoke to the soothsayer, to the Maker, who are the diviners: "You must work together and find the means so that man, whom we shall make, man, whom we are going to make, will nourish and sustain us, invoke and remember us.

"Enter, then, into council, grandmother, grandfather, our grandmother, our grandfather, Xpiyacoc, Xmucané, make light, make dawn. have us invoked, have us adored, have us remembered by created man, by made man, by mortal man. 8 Thus be it done.

"Let your nature be known, Hunahpú-Vuch, Hunahpú-Utiú, twice-mother, twice-father, 9 Nim-Ac, 10 Nima-Tziis, 11 the master of emeralds, the worker in jewels, the sculptor, the carver, the maker of beautiful plates, the maker of green gourds, the master of resin, the master Toltecat, 12 grandmother of the sun, grandmother of dawn, as you will be called by our works and our creatures.

"Cast the lot with your grains of corn and tzité, 13 Do it thus 14 and we shall know if we are to make, or carve his mouth and eyes out of wood." Thus the diviners were told.

They went down at once to make their divination, and

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cast their lots with the corn and the *tzité*. "Fate! Creature!" 15 said an old woman and an old man. And this old man was the one who cast the lots with *Tzité*, the one called *Xpiyacoc*. 16 And the old woman was the diviner, the maker, called *Chiracán Xmucané*. 17

Tchee-rah kahn Shmoo-Kahnay
Beginning the divination, they said: "Get together, grasp each other! Speak, that we may hear." They said, "Say if it is well that the wood be got together and that it be carved by the Creator and the Maker, and if this [man of wood] is he who must nourish and sustain us when there is light when it is day!

"Thou, corn; thou, *tzité*; thou, fate; thou, creature; get together, take each other," they said to the corn, to the *tzité*, to fate, to the creature. "Come to sacrifice here, Heart of Heaven; do not punish *Tepeu* and *Gucumatz*!" 18

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Then they talked and spoke the truth: "Your figures of wood shall come out well; they shall speak and talk on earth."

"So may it be," they answered when they spoke.

And instantly the figures were made of wood. They looked like men, talked like men, and populated the surface of the earth.

They existed and multiplied; they had daughters, they had sons, these wooden figures; but they did not have souls, nor minds, they did not remember their Creator, their Maker; they walked on all fours, aimlessly.

They no longer remembered the Heart of Heaven and therefore they fell out of favor. It was merely a trial, an attempt at man. At first they spoke, but their face was without expression; their feet and hands had no strength; they had no blood, nor substance, 19 nor moisture, nor flesh; their cheeks were dry, their feet and hands were dry, and their flesh was yellow.

Therefore, they no longer thought of their Creator nor their Maker, nor of those who made them and cared for them. 20

These were the first men who existed in great numbers on the face of the earth.

Footnotes

12:1 p. 200 *U vinaquil huyub*, literally, "the little man of the forest." The Indians in ancient times believed that the forests were peopled with these little beings, guardians, spirits of the forests, a species of hobgoblin similar to the *alux* of the Maya. The Memorial Cakchiquel calls them *ru vinakil chee*, from *che*, "tree" which Father Coto translates as "the hobgoblin which walks in the mountains," p. 201 and by another name, the *Zakikoxol*. According to the Memorial, the ancient Cakchiquel used to speak with these little men who were the spirits of the volcano of Fuego, *ru cux huyu chi Gag*, called *Zakikoxol*.

12:2 *Ta x-r'ah cu qui tih chic qui quih* in the original.

12:3 *Mi x-yopih r'auaxic u zaquiric*. "Already the time of planting nears" is the meaning which Brasseur de Bourbourg incorrectly gives to this sentence, getting ahead of events, because man

had not yet been created, nor had agriculture yet been practiced.

12:4 *Mavi mi x-utzinic ca quihiloxic, ca calaixic puch cumal*, in the original text.

12:5 *Xa cul u vach*.

12:6 *Ahtzac, Ahbit*, variants of *Tzacol* and *Bitol*.

12:7 *R'atit quih, R'atit zac*. The word *atit* may be taken here in the collective sense, including the two grandparents Xpiyacoc and Xmucané, who are later called by their names in the text. The same expression is found farther on.

12:8 *Vinac poy, vinac anom*. *Poy anom*, in Cakchiquel, has the meaning of "the mortal."

12:9 *Camul Alom, camul Qaholom*. The author calls Hunahpú-Vuch, "two times mother," and Hunahpú-Utiú, "two times father," thus giving the sex of each of the two members of the Creator-couple.

12:10 Large wild boar, or wild pig. *Nim-Ac* is the father.

12:11 *Nimá-Tziis*, the mother, large *pisote* or *coati mundi* (*Nasua nasica*). It might also be interpreted as large tapir (*Tix* in Poconchí, *tzimín* in Jacalteca). The tapir was the sacred animal of the Tzeltal Indians of Chiapas, and Bishop Núñez de la Vega says that, according to legend, Votán took a tapir to Huehuetlán, and that it multiplied in the waters of the river which runs through Soconusco, a district in the present state of Chiapas, Mexico.

12:12 Here the text seems to enumerate the usual occupations of the men of that time. The author calls upon *ahqual*, who is evidently the one who carves emeralds or green stones; *ahyamanic*, the jeweler or silversmith; *ahchut*, engraver or sculptor; *ahtzalam*, carver or cabinetmaker; *ahraxalac*, he who fashions green or beautiful plates; *ahraxazel*, he who makes the beautiful green vases or gourds (called *Xicalli* in Náhuatl)--the word *raxá* has both meanings; *ahgol*, he who makes the resin or copal; and, finally, *ahtoltecat*, he who, without doubt, was the silversmith. The Tolteca were, in fact, skilled silversmiths who, according to the legend, were taught the art by Quetzalcoatl himself.

12:13 *Erythrina corallodendron*. *Tzité, arbol de pito* in Guatemala; *Tzompanquahuitl* in the Mexican language. It is used in both countries to make fences. Its fruit is a pod which contains red grains resembling a bean which the Indians used, as they still do, together with grains of corn, in their fortune telling p. 202 and witchcraft. In his *Informe contra Idolorum Cultores*, Sánchez de Aguilar says that the Maya Indians "cast lots with a large handful of corn." As is seen, the practice which is still observed by the Maya-Quiché is of respectable antiquity.

12:14 *Chi banatahic xa pu ch'el apon-oc*, literally: "Do it so and it will be done."

12:15 *Quih!, Bit!* The first word is "sun," and Brasseur de Bourbourg translates it as such, but it also means "fate," and this is evidently its meaning in this invocation.

12:16 *Ah tzité*, he who tells the fortune by the grains of *tzité*; Bassetta interprets the word as "sorcerer," who in this case, is Xpiyacoc.

12:17 *Are curi atit ahquih, ahbit, Chiracán Xmucané u bi*. The *ahquih* was the priest and sorcerer, and these very respected officers are still so called in Quiché. *Ahbit* is the creator and maker. *Chiracán Xmucané* is the same as the Great Xmucané.

12:18 *C'at quix la uloc, at u Qux cah, m'a cahizah u chi, u vach Tepeu, Gucumatz*. Here other

translators have rendered the verb quix as "to shame." Brasseur de Bourbourg observes that it may also signify "to sting" or "take out blood" with a thorn. This was a common form of sacrifice among the Indians, and seems to indicate the real meaning of the sentence as used by the author. *Qahizan vach* is "to punish," according to the *Vocabulario de los Padres Franciscanos*. The entire passage is an invitation to the Heart of Heaven to come and take part in casting lots and not let the diviners fail.

12:19 *Comahil*, "blood," substance of the person. Father Coto, *Vocabulario Cakchiquel*.

12:20 *Alay quech*, *quxlaay quech*.

Next: I. Chapter 3