



GLST 287

What can the K'iche' creation stories teach us about how to live with the existence of plagues and disease?

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# OUTLINE

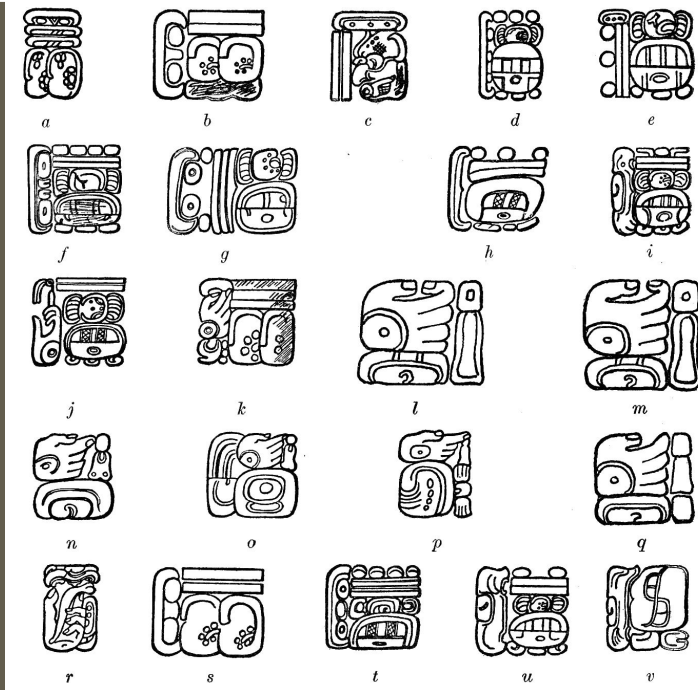
- hieroglyphics, transcription and translation
- strange yet familiar stories
- time, structure, characters
- lords of Xibalba (lords of illness)
- containment of lords of Xibalba (what can we learn from these epic struggles?)
- a cautionary tale

*HIEROGLYPHICS, TRANSCRIPTION,  
TRANSLATION*

# FOLDED SCREEN BOOKS



# HIEROGLYPHICS



**T**HIS IS THE BEGINNING OF THE ANCIENT WORD, here in this place called Quiché. Here we shall inscribe, we shall implant the Ancient Word, the potential and source for everything done in the citadel of Quiché, in the nation of Quiché people.

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

the Maker, Modeler,  
named Bearer, Begetter,  
Hunahpu Possum, Hunahpu Coyote,  
Great White Peccary, Coati,  
Sovereign Plumed Serpent,  
Heart of the Lake, Heart of the Sea,  
plate shaper, bowl shaper, as they are called,  
also named, also described as  
the midwife, matchmaker  
named Xpiyacoc, Xmucane,  
defender, protector,  
twice a midwife, twice a matchmaker,

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

a place to see it, a Council Book,  
a place to see “The Light That Came from  
Beside the Sea,”  
the account of “Our Place in the Shadows.”  
a place to see “The Dawn of Life,”

as it is called. There is the original book and ancient writing, but the one who reads and assesses it has a hidden identity. It takes a long performance and account to complete the lighting of all the sky-earth:

the fourfold siding, fourfold cornering,  
measuring, fourfold staking,  
halving the cord, stretching the cord

*STRANGE YET FAMILIAR STORIES*



**A**ND HERE IS THE ACCOUNT OF A MAIDEN, the daughter of a lord named Blood Gatherer.

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

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

“I’m not acquainted with that tree they talk about. ‘ “Its fruit is truly sweet!” they say,’ I hear,” she said.

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

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

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

*TIME, STRUCTURE, CHARACTERS*

## AZTEC SUNSTONE







CŌĀTL (NAHAUTL)= CUATE = BRO



*LORDS OF XIBALBA (LORDS OF  
ILLNESS)*

## LORDS OF XIBALBA

- Scab Stripper and Blood Gatherer
  - Gathers blood shed upon the ground as a result of injury, illness or violence. Blood is served to his fellow lords at a banquet.
- Demon of Pus and Demon of Jaundice
  - Yellow, jaundice
- Bone Scepter and Skull Scepter
  - end stages of starvation (asciates)
- Demon of Filth and Demon of Woe
  - Best way to keep demons from Xibalba away is to keep house swept clean
- Wing and Packstrap (*mecapal*)
  - worn by porters worn on across forehead to secure burdens carried on back.
- Owls: heralds of sickness and death

## PRAYER

Contemporary Quichés also believe that illness is caused by various underworld lords. The following is from a prayer for protection in which the lords of illness and death are invoked and propitiated with offerings at a shrine in the cemetery at Chichicastenango

“lord of sickness and pain, of death and destruction in the roads and trails, of death and destruction through aguardiente, of death and destruction from food poisoning, of death and destruction from vomiting, of death and destruction from strain and exertion—come hither, be seated before this World of the cemetery! And also the master of pain and misfortune, of wounds from pistols and knives and cutlasses, from Remingtons and Mausers, come hither, be seated before this World of the cemetery! And also the lord of vomiting and indigestion, the lord of fever and dysentery, and also the lord of cold sweat (malaria) and green chill (tuberculosis), of swellings of the abdomen (cancer), of influenza and bronchitis, and also the lord of all the minor illnesses; and also the lord of smallpox, come hither before this mountain shrine of the cemetery! Be seated here, however many may be your manifestations; look upon us here before this World. Be seated, all of you. Lords, pardon my trespass”



*CONTAINMENT OF LORDS OF XIBALBA*

# TOAD

Late Classic Maya Vase



# MOSQUITO

Late Classic Maya vase



"Take pity on us, Hunahpu and Xbalanque! It is true that we wronged your fathers, the ones you name. Those two are buried at the Place of Ball Game Sacrifice," they replied.

"Very well. Now this is our word, we shall name it for you. All of you listen, you Xibalbans: because of this, your day and your descendants will not be great. Moreover, the gifts you receive will no longer be great, but reduced to scabrous nodules of sap. There will be no cleanly blotted blood for you, just griddles, just gourds, just brittle things broken to pieces. Further, you will only feed on creatures of the meadows and clearings. None of those who are born in the light, begotten in the light will be yours. Only the worthless will yield

themselves up before you. These will be the guilty, the violent, the wretched, the afflicted. Wherever the blame is clear, that is where you will come in, rather than just making sudden attacks on people in general. And you will hear petitions over headed-up sap,” all the Xibalbans were told.

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

Their ancient day was not a great one,  
these ancient people only wanted conflict,  
their ancient names are not really divine,  
but fearful is the ancient evil of their faces.

They are makers of enemies, users of owls,  
they are inciters to wrongs and violence,  
they are masters of hidden intentions as well,  
they are black and white,  
masters of stupidity, masters of perplexity,

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

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

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

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

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

After that, they put it into words:

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

It was staples alone that made up their flesh.

THE YELLOW CORN AND  
WHITE CORN WERE GROUND:

*This woman is rubbing a  
hand stone ("mano") over a  
grinding stone ("metate") that  
has stone feet. From a Late  
Classic Maya bowl.*



*A CAUTIONARY TALE*



## CAUTIONARY TALE

- Mayan civilization collapsed two times in the past, first in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, secondly between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- They were forced to flee their cities
- Theories
  - Drought
  - Epidemic diseases (endemic infections related to trypanosomiasis, *Ascaris*, and some enteropathogens that cause acute diarrheal illness).
  - Overpopulation
  - Ecological collapse
  - War



They came into being, they multiplied, they had daughters, they had sons, these manikins, woodcarvings. But there was nothing in their hearts and nothing in their minds, no memory of their mason and builder. They just went and walked wherever they wanted. Now they did not remember the Heart of Sky.

And so they fell, just an experiment and just a cutout for humankind. They were talking at first but their faces were dry. They were not yet

developed in the legs and arms. They had no blood, no lymph. They had no sweat, no fat. Their complexions were dry, their faces were crusty. They flailed their legs and arms, their bodies were deformed.

And so they accomplished nothing before the Maker, Modeler who gave them birth, gave them heart. They became the first numerous people here on the face of the earth.

They were pounded down to the bones and tendons, smashed and pulverized even to the bones. Their faces were smashed because they were incompetent before their mother and their father, the Heart of Sky, named Hurricane. The earth was blackened because of this; the black rainstorm began, rain all day and rain all night. Into their houses came the animals, small and great. Their faces were crushed by things of wood and stone. Everything spoke: their water jars, their tortilla griddles, their plates, their cooking pots, their dogs, their grinding stones, each and every thing crushed their faces. Their dogs and turkeys told them:

"You caused us pain, you ate us, but now it is *you* whom *we* shall eat."  
And this is the grinding stone:

"We were undone because of you.

Every day, every day,  
in the dark, in the dawn, forever,  
r-r-rip, r-r-rip,  
r-r-rub, r-r-rub,  
right in our faces, because of you.

This was the service we gave you at first, when you were still people, but today you will learn of our power. We shall pound and we shall grind your flesh," their grinding stones told them.

And this is what their dogs said, when they spoke in their turn:

"Why is it you can't seem to give us our food? We just watch and you just keep us down, and you throw us around. You keep a stick ready when you eat, just so you can hit us. We don't talk, so we've received nothing from you. How could you not have known? You *did* know that we were wasting away there, behind you.

"So, this very day you will taste the teeth in our mouths. We shall eat you," their dogs told them, and their faces were crushed.

And then their tortilla griddles and cooking pots spoke to them in turn:

"Pain! That's all you've done for us. Our mouths are sooty, our faces are sooty. By setting us on the fire all the time, you burn us. Since *we* felt no pain, *you* try it. We shall burn you," all their cooking pots said, crushing their faces.

The stones, their hearthstones were shooting out, coming right out of the fire, going for their heads, causing them pain. Now they run for it, helter-skelter.

They want to climb up on the houses, but they fall as the houses collapse.

They want to climb the trees; they're thrown off by the trees.

