

THE FOUR AGES OF THE POPOL VUH

Throughout this work I have availed myself of the 1947 translation of Adrian Recinos, *Popol Vuh: las antiguas historias del Quiché*; the more recent English version by D. Tedlock, *Popol Vuh: The Definitive Edition of the Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life and the Glories of Gods and Kings*; and Goetz and Morley's translation of Recinos's Spanish version, *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Ancient Quiché Maya*.⁽²⁵⁾

The Popol Vuh portends to be the revelation of the gods, which it proceeds to enumerate. The preamble describes the division of the book between the deeds of the gods and the subsequent human history. Mention is made of an original Popol Vuh that no longer exists. According to the text, in the original was clearly visible “the coming from the other side of the sea [likely reference to Atlantis] and the narration of our obscurity, and our life.” (Preamble)

The Popol Vuh begins in the same way as the Book of Genesis. The earth was not yet created and air and water were the only two elements present. It was still night. The world was set in motion by the Progenitors—the Great Mother and the Great Father—and the duo Tepeu and Gucumatz, who were in the waters. In the heaven was Heart of Heaven, also called Huracan. Heart of Heaven is one and threefold, formed of Caculha Huracan, the lightning, Chipi Caculha, the small flash, Raxa Caculha, the thunder.⁽²⁶⁾ Tepeu and Gucumatz deliberated together on how to bring light and life. From the heavens came forth the creative word of Heart of Heaven. From the mutual deliberation and wishes of the gods and through their creative word, the earth sprang forth. Later the mountains, valleys, and trees arose. Tepeu and Gucumatz addressed Heart of Heaven in rejoicing. The latter replied, “Our creation will be concluded.”

What follows is the creation of human beings. There were three stages and three failures. The fourth successful attempt is elaborated in much more detail later in the text, throughout Parts I and II.

The first stage was the creation of the “brutes,” beings that lived very close to the animalistic stage. Each of them was assigned his own territory. The gods begged the brutes to call on their creators, to hallow their names. But none of them could speak, although each uttered different sounds. After a second trial the gods realized their failure. They decreed that the brutes would be of benefit for their flesh, that they would have to sacrifice themselves for others, becoming in effect animals.

Still, the gods yearned for a being that could call on their name and bring them sustenance. The second human being was thus created from earth and mud, but it lacked cohesion and strength. It could speak but had no reason, nor could he multiply. The gods undid their creation and now called on the help of the pair of ancients, Ixpiyacoc and Ixmucane, described as diviners and soothsayers. They had to create mortal man. This was the stage of the creation of Wood Man, the mannequins made of wood. They resembled men, and could talk, procreate, and spread over the earth. Their feet and hands weren't fully formed, nor did they have blood or fat. They lacked a soul, reason, and any memory of their creators. Their forgetfulness was the source of their disgrace. That is why Heart of Heaven caused a flood that brought about the end of Wood Man.

At the stage of Third Man, for the first time the Popol Vuh mentions an explicit differentiation of the sexes. Man's flesh was made from *tzite*, a bean, the woman from *tule*, a reed. However, human beings still lacked thought, and did not remember to honor the gods. A dark, endless rain caused their ruin this time. Not only the elements rebelled against humanity—so did the utensils and the domesticated animals. Pots, pans, grinding stones, and dogs complained of having been mistreated by their owners. The animals and utensils wanted the humans to experience the pain they endured. Humanity was thus annihilated. Only the monkeys in the woods survived as descendents of that age. We will discuss the Fourth Age in greater detail throughout much of the rest of the book.

The Four Ages and Evolution of Consciousness

American interpretation of history has been mired in insurmountable difficulties. With the nearly absolute absence of dates in the time before our era it is almost impossible to give mythologies their due and place events in a context of time. The Popol Vuh allows us to lay the foundations of the stages of development of pre-historical and historical American civilizations. That stages of development and stages of consciousness of humanity do not coincide will become obvious through some basic observation. The present day Native Americans differ greatly among themselves through their social organization, religious practices, worldviews, etc. The inhabitants of the Tierra del Fuego live at a stage of development antedating the introduction of religious ritual. So did the Yahi and their last representative, Ishi. Nomadic cultures, such as the Apache or Sioux, differ from agricultural societies such as the Pueblos. Consciousness did not evolve homogeneously throughout the continent. Added to this, different waves of immigration succeeded each other throughout the centuries.

We will call attention to the difference between the stages of development of various civilizations and stages of consciousness by calling the first one Age (First Age, Second Age, etc.) and the second one Man (First Man, Second Man, etc.). First Man is a stage of consciousness originating from the First Age but subsisting through all the subsequent Ages. In the present Fourth Age, all the stages of consciousness co-exist; thus we have First Man, Second Man, Third Man, and Fourth Man. The reader needs to keep in mind that the process of evolution of consciousness is an ongoing one. At no stage does it fully replicate the past. The Fuegiños, inhabiting the southern tip of the Americas, do not possess the same pre-religious consciousness or practices that were widespread when all of America was still at their stage of development.

To be able to follow the stages of development of consciousness we need to refer to a homogeneous group. To be able furthermore to place these in a chronology, we need to refer to one such process of development that was brought to completion at the major turning points of American development. Such is the process described in the Popol Vuh because of the central role played in Mesoamerica by Mayan civilization. What the Popol Vuh shows, unlike many other mythologies of the continent, is the complete unfolding of four successive stages of consciousness and their full achievement. The Fourth Age marks the full achievement of historical consciousness. This stage was first attained by Mayan civilization, as we will see later. How the Aztecs could claim to have reached further to the stage of a Fifth Sun is a matter that will be elucidated in chapter nine.

A further difficulty in the present analysis lies in the continuous waves of migration. We have seen above that already before the end of the Atlantean times there were migrations from the sinking continent. Later migratory waves came from Asia; they are the ones that history mostly acknowledges. In more recent times as research begins to highlight more and more, there have also been migrations reaching the Americas from Europe. The races most often mentioned in this context are the Celts, Phoenicians, Babylonians, and Hebrews. We will consider some of these migrations in later chapters, particularly in the seventh. Otherwise we can consider that the agent of change won't be as important as the nature of the change of consciousness and the stage of development to which it corresponds.

Steiner has described the development of humanity from the times of Lemuria, through Atlantis, to the development of the present Post-Atlantean epoch. These descriptions will serve here as a parallel frame of reference. We must keep in mind that the orderly development of the epochs of

civilization (Polaris, Hyperborea, Lemuria, Atlantis, present earth) is differentiated all over the earth. While Atlantis was undergoing its own evolution, other areas of the earth were inhabited, and were undergoing a parallel evolution. There isn't one sequence of development that applies all over the globe, but rather particular sequences according to the different pre-historical developments that occurred in any geographical area.

There is general agreement between archaeologists and the native documents of Central and South America as far as the first three ages are concerned (see tableau on p. 56). The Ages have also been called the Suns or Worlds. In different places of the Popol Vuh we are told of the Dawning. This event refers as much as to an external occurrence as it does correspond to a change of consciousness. For some ethnic groups such as the Hopis, each successive change of consciousness is seen as another Dawning or, in their terms, an "Emergence."

In order to amplify the understanding of the four ages we will refer to the Popol Vuh, part I, Chapters 1 to 3. To this will be added the record of archaeology. What follows is a short summary of the narrative of the Three Ages up to the beginning of the Fourth, with the help of Girard's added research.⁽²⁷⁾

First Age: The Giants

During the First Age man still lived within a paradisiacal world with no knowledge of evil. There was no real social structure and the division in moieties or clans did not exist yet. Life was organized in small blood-related, patrilineal groups. Girard calls this a purely individualistic stage. We actually prefer to call it pre-individualistic, since it precedes sexual differentiation and later evolution of individuality. Life was lived in simple communion with the spiritual world. Man, we are told, had a sense of the presence of the creator. There was as yet no ritual because there was no need for religion. Nor was there any ceremony of burial of the dead. In fact, spiritual science indicates that man did not go through the cycle of incarnation and excarnation. We are also told that man had no faculty of speech: "Speak our names, praise us, your mother, your father.... But they could not make them speak like men; they only hissed, screamed, cackled; they were unable to make words and each screamed in a different way." (Popol Vuh, Part I, Chapter 2) First Man did not know pottery. He did not build houses or temples but dwelt in caves.

This stage corresponds—at least in terms of consciousness—to the early stages of Lemurian man, who spiritual science tells us had no faculty of speech but transmitted thought through a kind of telepathy. Memory had

not yet developed. Lemurian man had power over the forces of his body; he could for example increase his strength through his will. His was a “religion of the will.” Those who held power were venerated by the others. The episode of Vucub Caquix and his sons—which refers to First Man (rather than First Age)—will highlight this titanic strength. Of Lemuria, Steiner says that the majority of humanity could only be qualified as merely reaching an animal stage. We see therefore that what the Popol Vuh defines as man of the First Age is equivalent to humanity at the early Lemurian stage of development.

The end of the First Age comes with man’s transformation into animals—those that incarnated too soon. “Accept your destiny: your flesh shall be torn to pieces. So shall it be. This shall be your lot.” (Part I, Chapter 2) Humanity of the First Age still existed in later times. It is native knowledge that not all the First Men disappeared or were transformed into animals. We will see an example of it in the next chapter of the Popol Vuh with the episode of Vucub Caquix.

Second Age: Religion

Man of the Second Age knew how to speak but lacked understanding. He is called Mud Man in the sacred text. Girard defined the Second Age as patriarchal and collective. The social organization evolved to the level of moieties, practicing so-called exogamic marriage outside of one’s moiety. The simplest unit is the macro-family of three generations. Property is held in common. The village has become the political unity and is now ruled by a council of chiefs. The gods that play a role in this period are what the Popol Vuh calls the Ahpus. The social organization is hinted at in the episode of Vucub Caquix, where man of the Second Age (or Second Man in the specific episode) is represented by the “Four Hundred Boys,” 400 (20 X 20) standing for a very large number in Mayan esotericism. This way of characterizing the group specifies at once the patriarchal and collective nature of the social organism. At this stage the sons inherit the moral and intellectual qualities of their progenitors.

Other innovations result from the Second Age. Most emblematic is the introduction of pottery, symbolic of the name Mud Man. Here we see a sign of the progressive movement from the prevailing Atlantean element of water towards the element of earth. Pottery is a further stage of dominion over the solid element. It will be followed in time with the use of wood and later stone in sculpture and architecture. The Ahpus introduce the arts, singing and painting in particular. Dancing probably dates from this period too. The first cultivated plants are roots: yucca, jicama, sweet potato, taro,

etc. Maize hasn't been introduced yet!

This Second Age had many similarities with the second part of Lemuria. Memory had developed but there was as yet no capacity for logical thinking. Language had its beginnings and so had singing and dancing, and the cultivation of plants for foodstuffs. The Popol Vuh points to a first knowledge of good and evil. With time the Second Age brought the transition from nomadic to sedentary life and the movement towards matriarchal society.

Overall the transition from First to Second Age was a small one. Its main result was the formation of a social structure. The only heroes of this age were the Four Hundred Boys; no true individuals are mentioned. The second Age ended with a flood. The Third Age will introduce much more radical changes.

Third Age: Matriarchy

The Third Age is the age of "Wood Man." The Quiché text indicates that man is made of the "wood" of tzite, a bean, and woman is made of tule, a reed used for making mats. Both plants originate from Guatemala. For the first time man is clearly distinguished from woman. The name Wood Man is associated with the fact that man enters the time of wooden implements, and of wooden sculpture.

The gods ask the help of Ixmucane and Ixpiyacoc, a couple of diviners. Ixpiyacoc, the male figure, plays a passive role in Mayan mythology. Ixmucane, the active one, indicates the transition from a patriarchal, or rather pre-individual, worldview into a matriarchal regime. Succession happens on the mother's side. The Grandmother (Ixmucane) is the head of the clan. Men have a politico-military role. We now see three generations: Ixmucane and Ixpiyacoc, Hun and Vucub Hunahpu (the so-called Ahpus), Hun Batz and Hun Chouen. The latter live with the Grandmother. At this stage the Ahpus initiate their descent into the Underworld. Before leaving, they ask Hun Batz and Hun Chouen to continue cultivating the arts and keep the fire in the hearth going, as well as "the warmth in the heart of your grandmother." (Part II, Chapter 2)

Hun Batz and Hun Chouen are the guides of this age. Their nature is still that of divine guides. They are musicians, singers, painters, sculptors, jewelers, dice players, and ball players. (Part II, Chapter 1) The effects of their innovations are dramatic. The Third Age starts with the domestication of animals and the true beginnings of horticulture. Maize, beans, and probably also the squash are introduced, and they will constitute the staple foods of all the generations to come. Smoking follows the cultivation of

tobacco. Other important cultivated plants are cocoa and copal (burned as incense). With cotton comes the art of weaving. The grindstone is also introduced in this period. Curiously it is called *camé*, as are the lords who rule in the later part of the Third Age.

Camé is an important name in the Third Age. Evil, now active in the world, is referred to through the presence of the adversary clan of Xibalba and its leaders, Hun Camé and Vucub Camé. We are told that the *tucurs* (magicians, literally owls) carry out human sacrifice inaugurated by the Camé. The task of the Third Age is to develop knowledge of the Underworld. The process will only be completed at the end of the Third Age with the episode of the descent of the Twins to the Underworld. We now find reference to the first use of torture by ants and thorns (as in the episode of the infancy of Hunahpu and Ixbalamqué). Human sacrifice appears in the form of decapitation (as in the death of the Hun Hunahpu) and quartering. Cannibalism also originates from this cultural horizon. Later, human sacrifice evolves towards the forms with organ removal.

In the religious field we witness the veneration of the dead and the appearance of the god of death. The dead are now buried in permanent cemeteries. There also develops the practice of secondary burial with exhumation of the bones, which are later hung on a tree. This goes together with the idea that the soul resides in the bones. Mummification is a practice that goes in the same direction and that mostly developed in South America. As we can see, humanity of this age wrestles with the question of immortality, which will only be resolved in the following age. Doubts about the immortality of the soul are accompanied by an intensifying dread of death and of the “end of times.” The New Fire Ceremony—celebrated every 52 years—is a vestige of this dread of death the end of times, as will appear more clearly when we turn to the study of Mesoamerican astrology.

The end result of the above evolution is the differentiation of the three worlds common to much of American mythology: heavens, earth, and underworld. The fall from the original state of union with the gods is accompanied by knowledge of the soul as that which weaves between the world of the spirit and the world of body and matter. The upper world is the world of spirit, that which lives beyond good and evil. The underworld is where good and evil are both present—it is the world of the soul. It should not be understood as a negative world, an equivalent of doctrinal hell, but rather as the world through which the soul evolves in its way to the land of the spirit. This is reflected in the fact that the dead are both sought under the earth or above in mountains or clouds; these are steps of their journey in the afterlife.

The priesthood becomes hereditary. The priest is also a healer and can predict the future. He is the shaman who can abandon his body through the intermediary of an animal guide. The introduction of animal sacrifice occurs also during this time—turkeys being the animal of choice. The first calendars are lunar, reflecting the importance of matriarchy.

The Third Age corresponds in many ways to the end of Lemuria and the transition into Atlantis. At this stage appear the beginnings of language, the predominant role of women, the domestication of animals and the introduction of agriculture, as well as the use of sacrificial animals. The end of the Third Age comes through a black rain (Part II, Chapter 3) and the rebellion of animals and utensils against humanity. It isn't clear whether the end of the age comes through rain or volcanic eruptions. However, references to volcanic and tectonic phenomena are clearly expressed in the chapter of Vucub Caquix, during the Third Age. At the end of the age Hun Batz and Hun Chouen are transformed into monkeys. The two will later represent the vices of idleness and envy in the Fourth Age.

Fourth Age

The Fourth Age will occupy us specifically in chapter 6. For the moment we can specify that it marks the transition from mythical to historical consciousness. The story of the three previous ages indicates which qualities men lacked and needed to develop. During the First Age the human being is a mere brute and has no faculty of speech. During the Second Age he can be compared to a mere lump of mud and has no memory. During the Third Age he is like a wooden statue; he has no faculty of understanding, and his lack of blood indicates lack of will. The ingredients that humanity needs to develop are spiritual: the power to speak, to remember, and to think. Maize Man, who has all the above qualities, inaugurates the Fourth Age. Maize Man's fate is associated with a whole new development of agriculture, intimately connected with ritual life and astrology.

Moral development is one way of looking at the deeper meanings of the Popol Vuh. Good and evil don't have merely a set role. They are only relative terms. The good of one epoch becomes the evil of the following one. The shaman/priest of the third epoch becomes the sorcerer of the fourth period. Hun Batz and Hun Chouen are the guides of the Third Age. By resisting the rise of the Twins they came to embody the vices of the next period: laziness, cruelty, and envy. This does not mean that they do not have a lawful place even in the Fourth Age. There they are the patrons of the arts and of merriment. The four representatives of First Age become the cosmic

bearers of the following ages. Nothing is static in the Popol Vuh. All truly corresponds to the reality of the spiritual development of races and peoples.

Girard highlights the fact that archaeology and indigenous sources are in agreement as far as the first three ages are concerned. To these three horizons Girard adds the horizon of the Fourth Age and Mayan patriarchy. Modern archaeology does not stress the differences of level of development reached by the Maya in relation to their contemporary cultures as Girard does in following the inner logic of the Popol Vuh. This is summarized in the following tableau:

According to Archaeologists	According to the Popol Vuh	Developments
<u>1st Horizon</u> : pre-historic	<u>1st Age</u> : “brutes”	Hunter-gatherers
<u>2nd Horizon</u> : Archaic	<u>2nd Age</u> : “mud man” “Four Hundred Boys”	Invention of pottery early development of Agriculture
<u>3rd Horizon</u> : Formative	<u>3rd Age</u> : “wood man,” Matriarchy	Sacred Calendar Calendar Round, Maize cultivation
<u>Classic Maya</u>	<u>4th Age</u> : “maize man,” patriarchy	Long Count, second maize crop

It is now possible to try to find a time frame for the four successive epochs. There are no strict correspondences between the four Ages and the epochs defined by Steiner; there are only parallels. The Ancient Toltecs—who emigrated from Atlantis before the Flood—carried an Atlantean consciousness to a continent that had not yet received the civilizing impulse of Atlantis. We find therefore mostly pre-Atlantean traits in the early populations of Mesoamerica. The First Age would correspond to this original American population. Whether living at the time of Atlantis or earlier, it remained at a pre-Atlantean stage of consciousness. The Second Age sees the beginning of a social organization, most likely the one introduced by the Ancient Toltecs in their first emigration from Atlantis. The Third Age appears through the rise of Olmec civilization, as we will see in the images of the Popol Vuh. It is the main thesis of this book that the Fourth Age in Mesoamerica was ushered by the Maya at the time of Christ.

The demonstration of the above theses is the subject of the following chapters.

The terminology referring to the periods of Mesoamerican history varies slightly according to authors or schools of thought. Thus, for example, what is Late Formative for some can be found as Proto-Classic for others. In order to keep homogeneity throughout the work we will refer to the following terminology:

Before 1500 BC:	Archaic
1500-800 BC:	Early Formative: onset of Olmec civilization
800-300 BC:	Middle Formative
300 BC-0:	Late Formative
AD 0-200:	Proto-Classic: rise of Mayan and Teotihuacan civilizations
AD 200-600:	Early Classic
AD 600-900:	Late Classic
AD 900-1200:	Terminal Classic/Early Post-Classic
AD 1200-Conquest (1519):	Late Post-Classic: rise of the Aztecs

For our purposes, First and Second Age are the periods that can be defined as Archaic, the Third Age closely corresponds with the rise of the Olmec and the Formative; the Fourth Age corresponds to the rise of Mayan civilization.

The different Ages bring with them different kinds of consciousness. To the original Lemurian man and Atlantean immigrants were added the waves of migration of the post-Atlantean times before and after the time of Christ. They form a complex chapter in the history of the Americas, one that lies beyond the scope of the present work. We will nevertheless explore the influences that reached Central America through Asia via the Bering Strait, and from Phoenicia and Palestine. To sum up then, the Four Ages give us a valid key of interpretation of the spiritual evolution of American humanity, a blueprint of development that receives confirmation from the anthropological record of North and South America. The Popol Vuh refers more to stages of consciousness than to historical migrations, because its focus is the central event of the Dawning and the spiritual forces that either opposed it or worked towards its realization.

The Four Ages and the Challenge of Post-Atlantean Time

Part II of the Popol Vuh explains in imaginative language the nature of the changes occurred during the Fourth Age. It is the thesis of this book that the

initiate of the Americas brought about the Fourth Age. Therefore we will deal in depth with the Fourth Age in chapters 6 and 7. At this moment it will be sufficient to indicate the progression of consciousness that can be followed from the First to the Fourth Age.

The Fourth Age is inaugurated by the Dawning and is the Age of Maize Man. Of the Ahpus that initiate the first descent to the Underworld, we are reminded that they are born in darkness. The Twins inaugurate the solar age. The change can be compared to a re-quickening of the earth. The Chilam Balam of Chumayel states: "The month [meaning the new astrology] was created when the earth awoke."⁽²⁸⁾ This leads us to believe that the Native American perceived at this stage important changes in the aura of the earth. Dawning and awakening on the earthly level further correspond to important changes of consciousness.

The Native American Atlantean-like consciousness had to undergo a dual process. On one hand it had to progressively penetrate the earth element, the element of space. Significantly the Second Man is Man of Mud, who did not quite reach a solid state. Next is Man of Wood, and we are told that only the last man had blood. As a Man of Maize he belongs to heaven, earth, and underworld just like the maize plant does at different stages of its development. The latter part of the Popol Vuh makes this notion very clear. The former sculptures of the continent make the words of the Popol Vuh understandable: "they had no extremities." The first sculptures show a very rudimentary knowledge of anatomy: the extremities are barely present. It is primarily at the stage of classical Mayan sculpture that the human body reaches the highest harmony of measure and proportion, fully representing human anatomy. It seems as though American Man gradually gains possession and consciousness of the full nature of the earthly element that permeates his body, as his consciousness progressively withdraws from the divine element of the environment.

The second process concerns the human being's relationship to time. The Fall from Paradise occurs at the end of the First Age. The pristine stage of union reached in the First Age leads us to the last stage of knowledge of immortality attained by Man of Maize. The "brute" doesn't need religion because he is in contact with the divinity. The Men of the Second and Third Age discover through memory the link between generations, initiate the rituals of burial, and inaugurate the era of religious practices. Man of the Third Age struggles with the notions of the underworld and of mortality. Here appears the problem of the finiteness of time. From this originates the dread of the extinction of the world so aptly depicted with the New Fire

ceremony, as we will see in the chapters about the Toltecs and the Aztecs. The astronomy of these two civilizations cannot depict the certainty of the continuity of time. That the Maya inaugurate another stage of civilization is highlighted by the resurrection of their solar god, Hunahpu, and the lunar counterpart, Ixbalamqué. What would appear as a mere symbol in the myth becomes a reality in the fact that the Maya are the first to devise a calendar that is no longer cyclical. It moves forward into eternity, because it is now based on a galactic point of reference.

Accompanying this movement of fall and redemption is the movement of separation between heaven and earth. From a world of waters and air we move into the creation of earth and mountains. Later in the Second Age, but especially in the Third Age, the Native American discovers the underworld. This movement deepens with the growing strength of the Camé and the Lords of Xibalba. Good and evil stand in full antagonism. The integration of underworld, earth, and upper-world can only occur through the integration of human and divine elements in the figures of the Twins. It is their resurrection that brings a new world and a new consciousness, accompanied by the event of the Dawning.