

A Photographic Essay  
By  
Justin Kerr







The Popol Vuh or The Book of Council was transcribed in the sixteenth century by an anonymous Quiché Maya writer living in or near the city of Chichicastenango in the highlands of Guatemala. Taught by Spanish friars, the unknown author had learned to write his Quiché language in Latin characters.

The author says: *...we shall bring it to light because the Popol Vuh, as it is called, cannot be seen any more,....*

**And from a new translation by Allan Christenson**

**“Because there is not now  
Means of seeing of Popol Vuh,  
Means of seeing clearly  
Come from across sea,  
Its account our obscurity,  
Means of seeing light life, as it is said.**

**There is original book anciently  
written also,  
Merely hidden his face”**

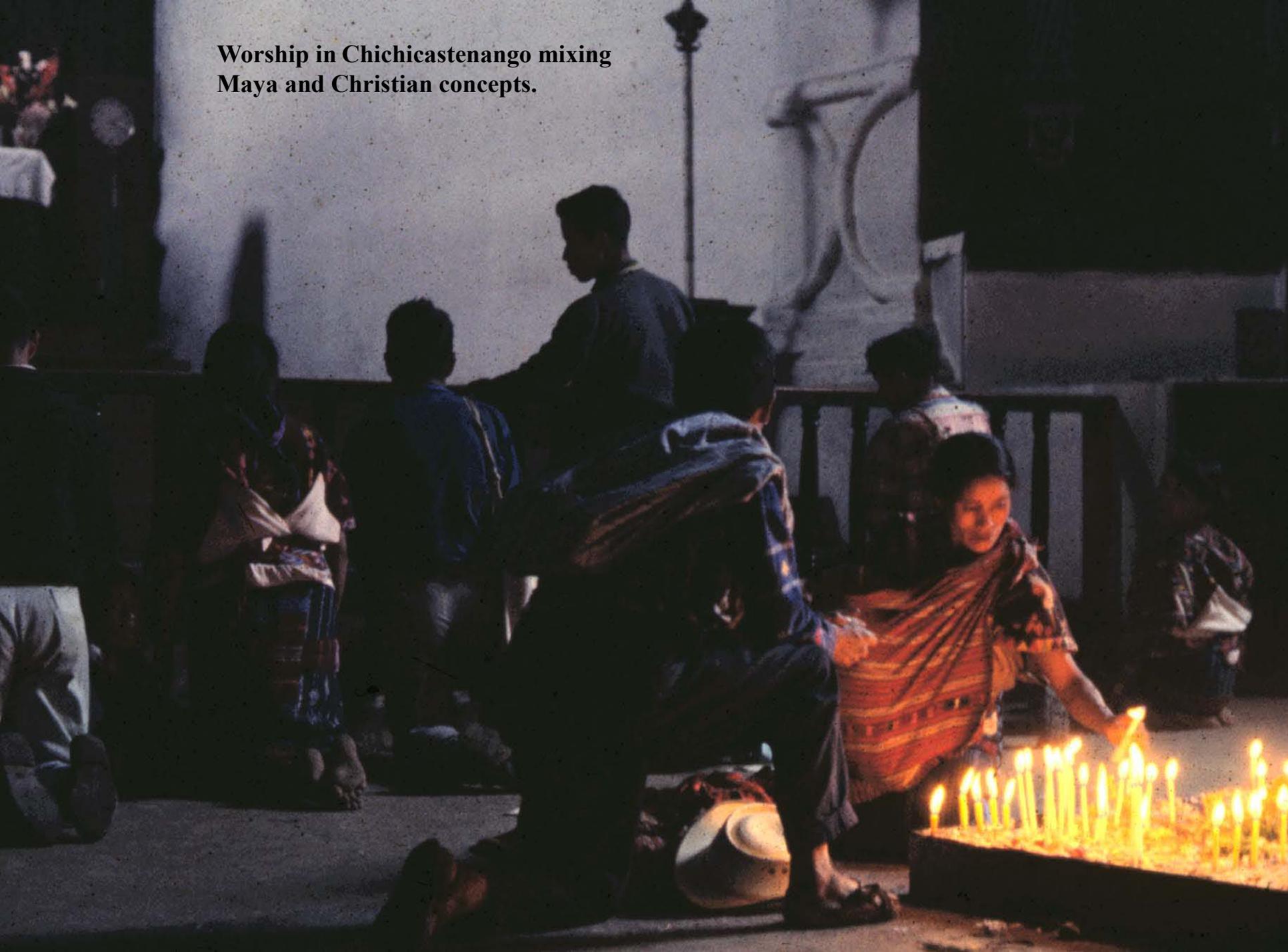


An Offering—Burning Copal

Bundles of COPAL, The incense that was used from earliest times till now



**Worship in Chichicastenango mixing  
Maya and Christian concepts.**





XXVI\*  
C. T.

Habiendo amanecido llamaron los Señores a Hun Hunahpú y a Vucub Hunahpú y les preguntaron:

—“¿Dónde está el tabaco y el ocote que os mandamos?”

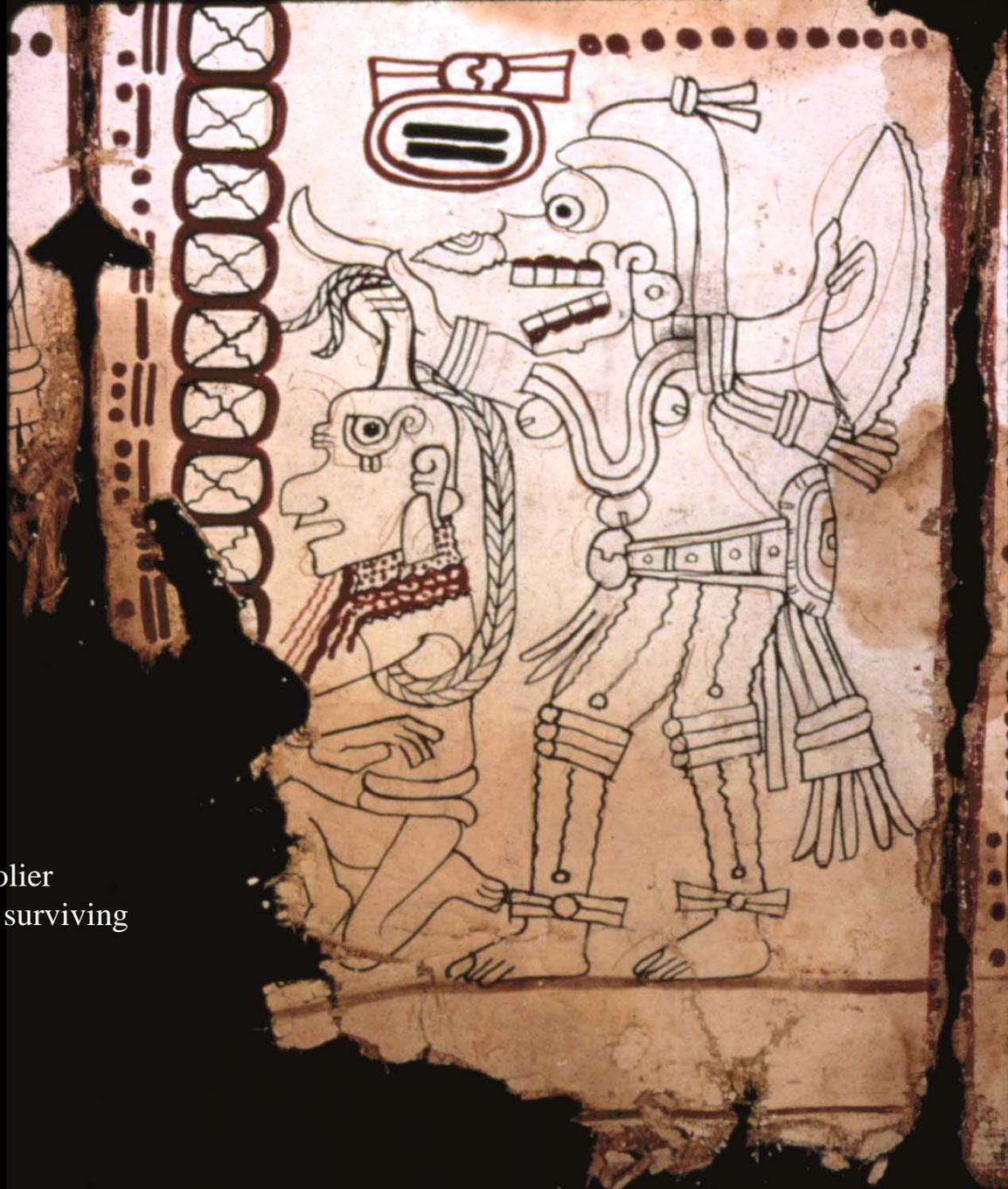
—“Se acabó todo, Señores”, respondieron.

—“Ya se cumplieron vuestros días y habéis de morir”, sentenciáronles los Ahauab de Xibalbá, los Señores del Infierno.

The Popol Vuh was  
published in a Spanish  
edition with  
illustrations from the  
Codicies

Published in Mexico  
1981

A page from the Grolier  
Codex, one of the 4 surviving  
Maya Books





**THE  
HERO  
TWIN**

*This is the account of how all was in suspense, all calm, all motionless, still and the expanse of the sky was empty. This is the first account, the first narrative. There was neither man, nor animals, birds, fishes, crabs, trees, stones, caves, ravines, grasses, nor forests; there was only the sky.*

*Thus let it be done! Let the emptiness be  
filled! Let there be light, let there be dawn  
in the sky and on the earth.*



The Forefathers Create The Animals--- The DEER,



# The BIRDS,



K4861

# And the Other Animals



K3332

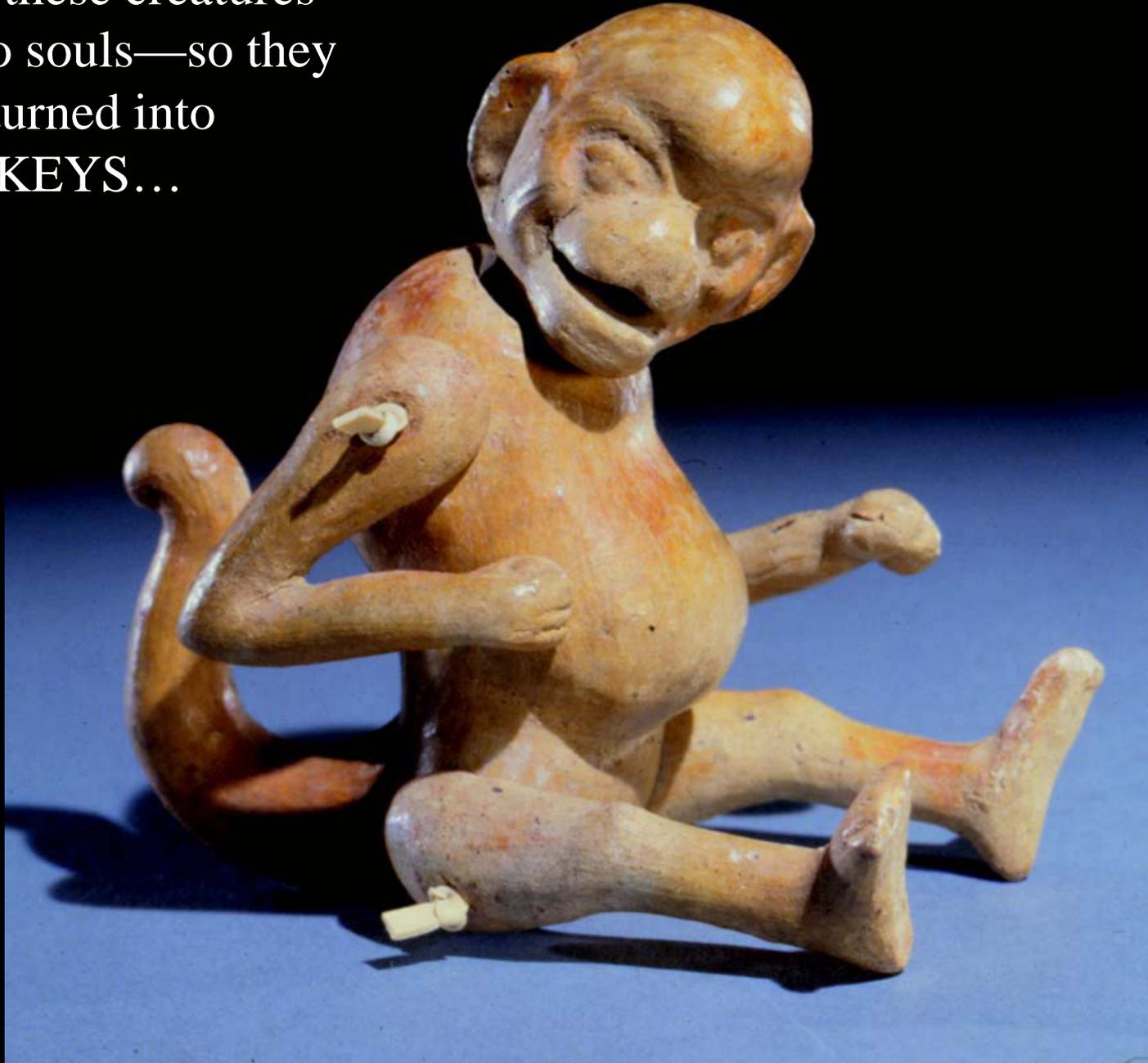
They made Humans from MUD



...and then they  
tried WOOD...



...but these creatures  
had no souls—so they  
were turned into  
MONKEYS...





... Women were  
made of  
rushes...

## Vucub Caquix speaks...

*I shall now be great above all beings created and formed. I am the sun, the light, the moon. Great is my splendor. Because of me men shall walk and conquer. For my eyes are of silver, bright, resplendent as precious stones, as emeralds; my teeth shine like precious stones, like the face of the sky. My nose shines afar like the moon, my throne is of silver, and the face of the earth is lighted when I pass before my throne. So, then I am the sun, I am the moon, for all mankind. So shall it be, because I can see very far.*



*This is the beginning of the defeat and the ruin of the glory of Vucub-Caquix brought about by two youths, the first of whom was called Hunahpú and the second, Xbalanqué. They were really gods.' When they saw the harm which the arrogant one had done, and wished to do, in the presence of the Heart of Heaven, the youths said: "It is not good that it be so, when man does not yet live here. on earth. Therefore, we shall try to shoot him with our blowgun when he is eating. We shall shoot him and make him sicken, and then that will be the end of his riches, his green stones, his precious metals, his emeralds, his jewels of which he is so proud. And this shall be the lot of all men, for they must not become vain, because of power and riches.*



Hunahpú

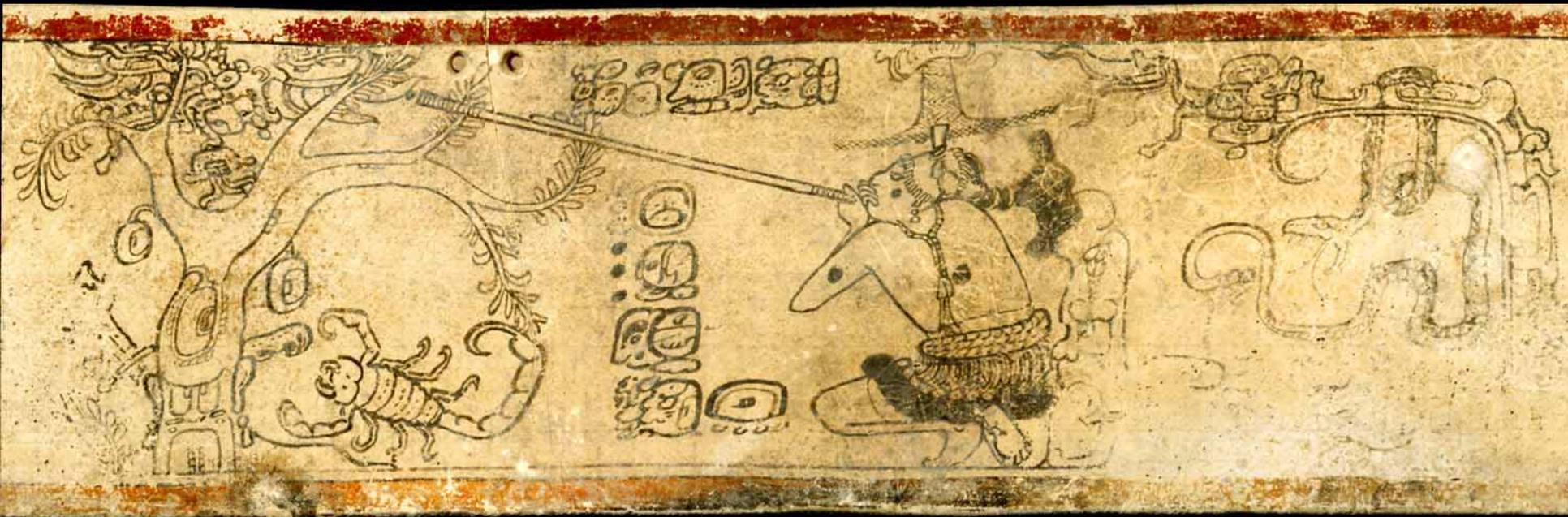


Xbalanqué





# The shooting of Vucub Caquix



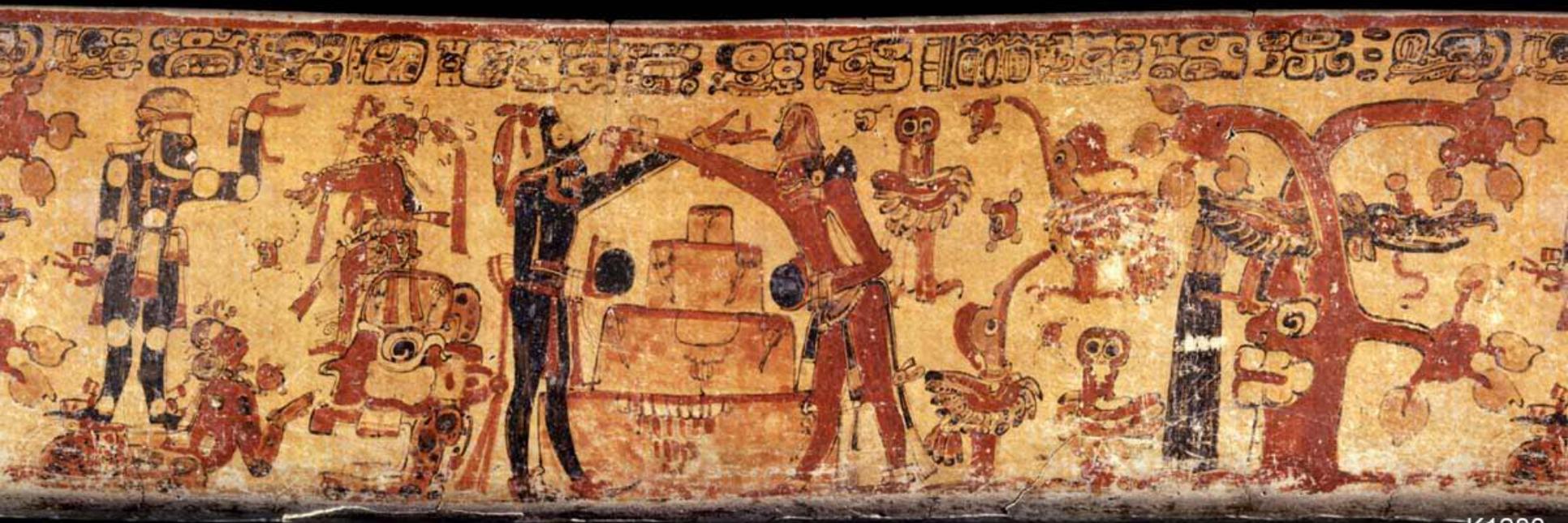
One of the sons of Vucub Caquix--- Zipacna



The 400 boys have a drunken party to celebrate the killing of Zipacna



The Twin's Father and Uncle play ball which rouses the ire of the  
Lords of the Otherworld



K1288

God K and God L  
Conspire to bring the  
Players to Xibalba.



K5810



...so they can steal the father's ball game equipment.







... they lose  
and grovel  
before a  
major  
deity...  
Itzamna



K1670

They are tortured in the House of Flame

They have to smoke cigars throughout the night, but return them un-burnt in the morning



The Father is  
decapitated...





The rat carries the  
decapitated head...

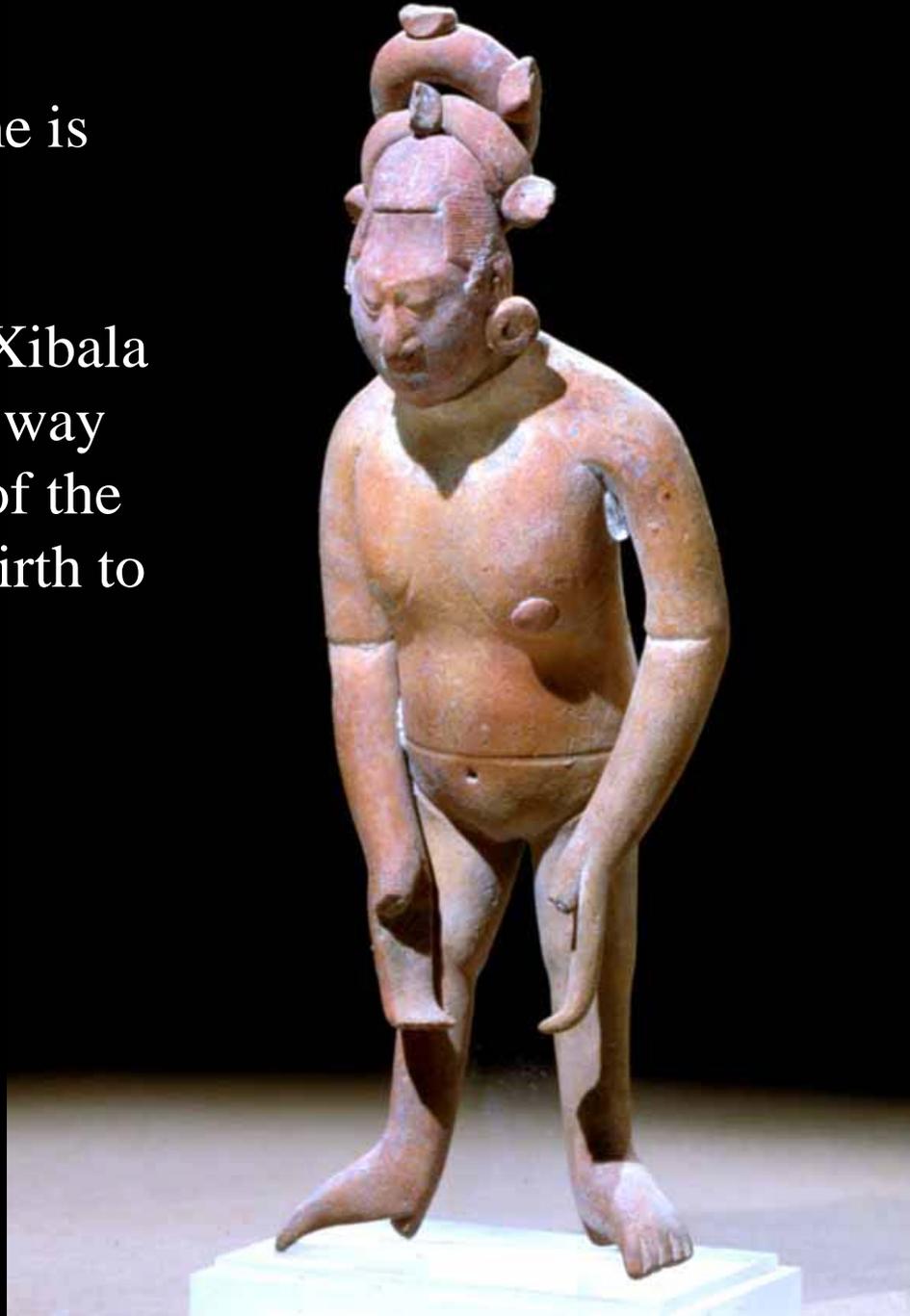
And the head is Hung in a Cacao Tree



A daughter of a Xibalban Lord is impregnated by the Head in the Tree



The Girl's name is Xquic; she is disgraced and thrown out of Xibalba and makes her way to the surface of the Earth to give birth to Twin Boys





One of Twins as a  
Child, they are  
Hunters...

They are also Scribes.

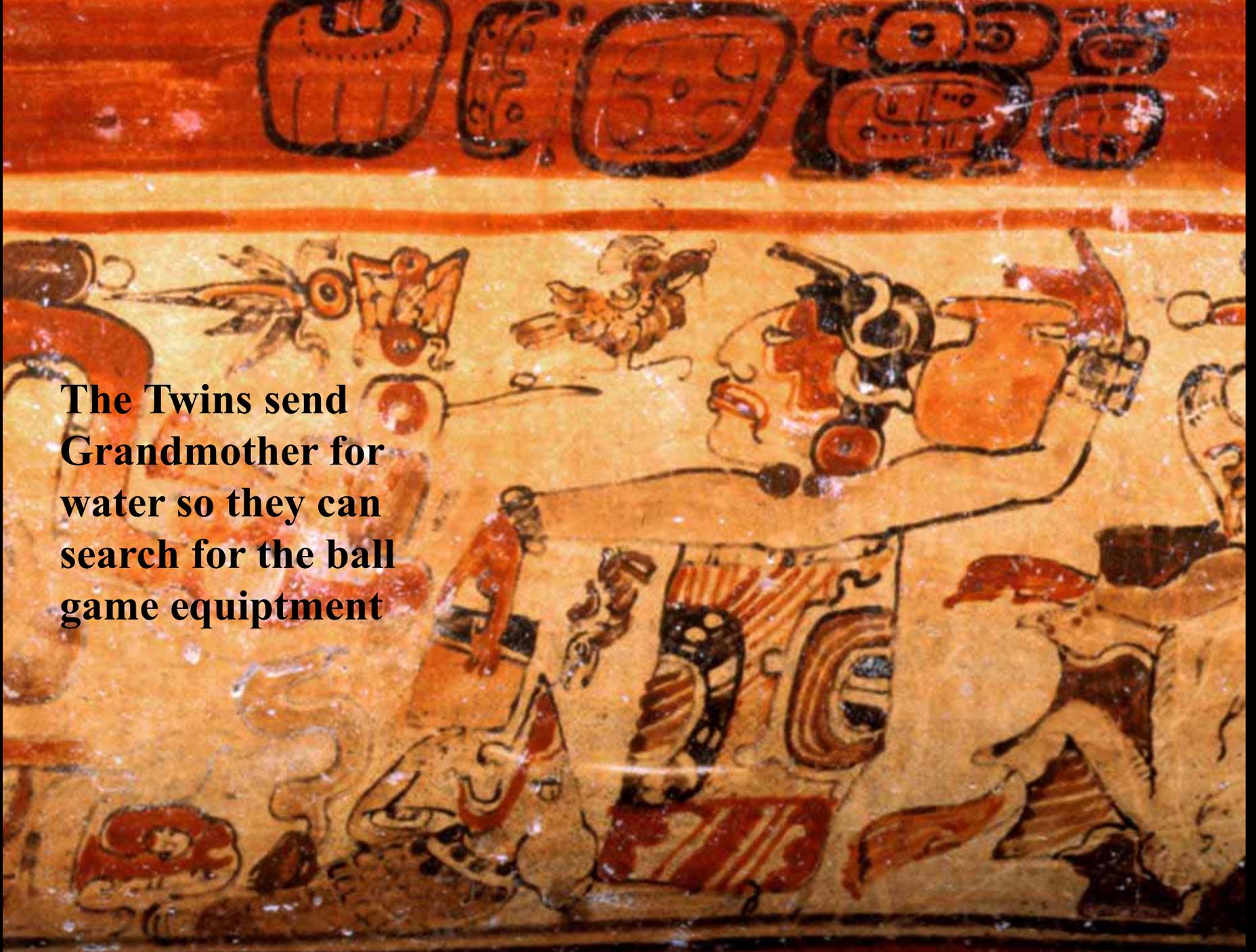


K1185

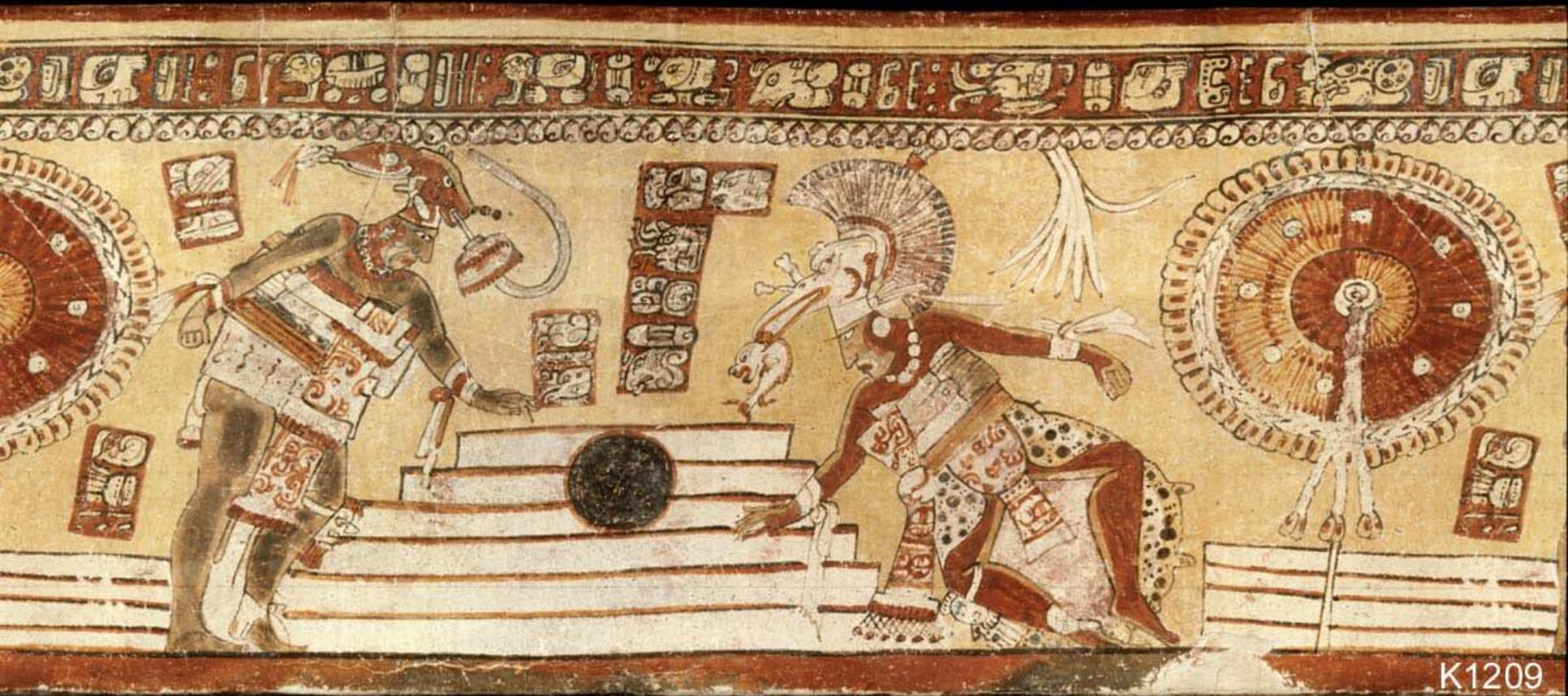


Grandmother hides the ball game  
equipment in the rafters of her house

**The Twins send  
Grandmother for  
water so they can  
search for the ball  
game equipment**



They find the ball game equipment and like their Father, play ball and rouse the ire of the Lords of the Otherworld



K1209



The Lords of  
the Otherworld  
send a  
messenger  
Toad to tell the  
Twins to come  
to Xibalba to  
play ball with  
them

The Twins meet with the Lord Itzamna, who shows them their father's head as a skull

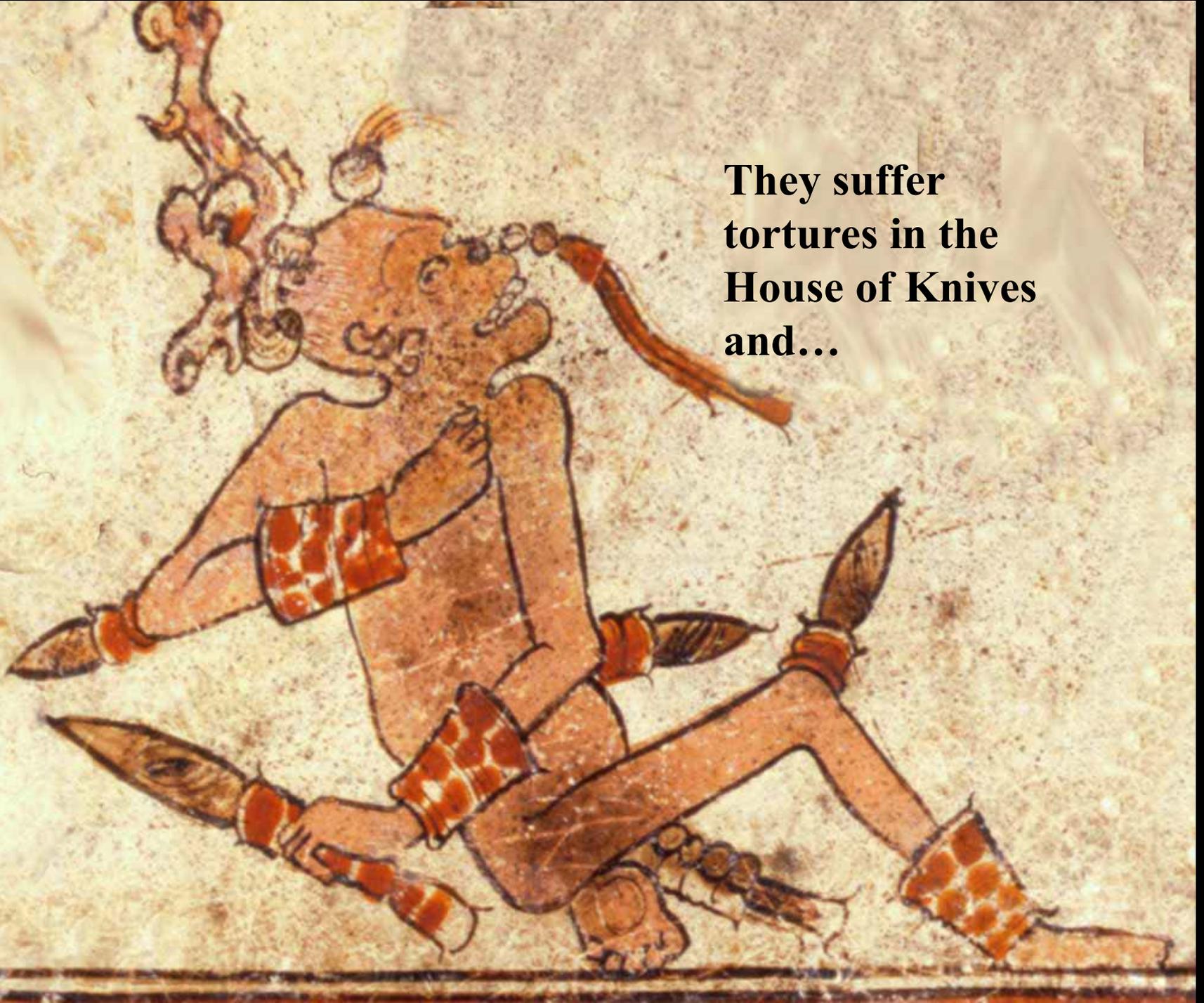


K1183

After they lose one of the games, they...



**They suffer  
tortures in the  
House of Knives  
and...**





The house of  
Flames, and...

# The House of Bats.



A Bat takes off the head of one of the Hero Twins, but



An Agouti brings a squash which turns into a head and regrows



They lose the last game. Their bones are ground up and thrown into the river



K3266

The Twins regenerate and turn into catfish

The Twins are now disguised as Dancers



As masked Magicians, they perform in the court of God L. They cut themselves up and put themselves back together again. Now they cut up one of the Lords of the Otherworld.



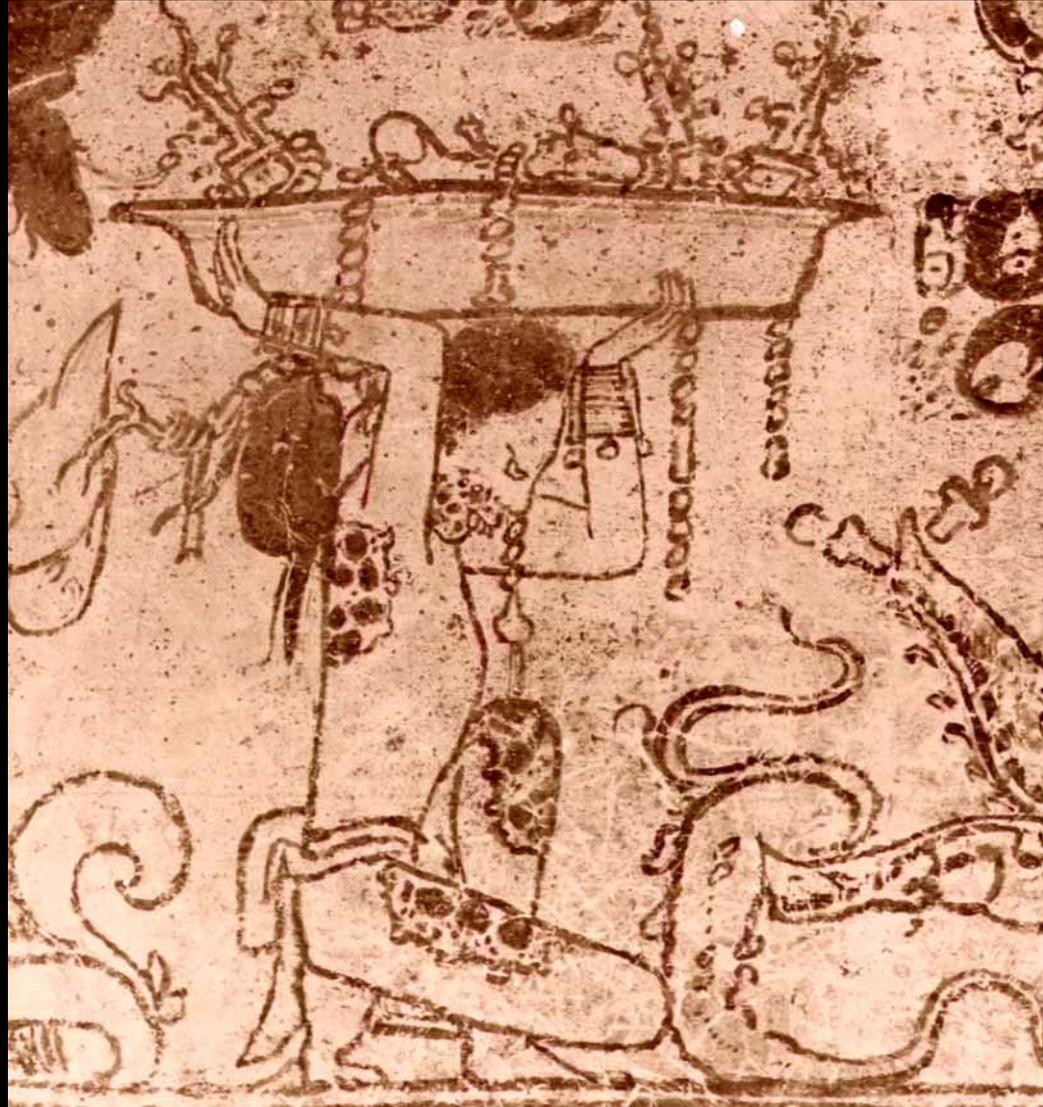
Although Masked, We can recognize Hunahpú cutting the neck of the Lord, while Xbalanqué holds his ax in readiness.



The Twins now control the Lords of the Otherworld. God N is pulled from his shell by one of the Twins who holds a stone knife.



K578



Xbalanqué brings  
jewels for the ladies  
to dress his Father for  
his rebirth

The Twins, on the right, assist the Ladies in the dressing of the Twin's Father, the Maize God, for his resurrection.



The Maize  
God is  
Reborn

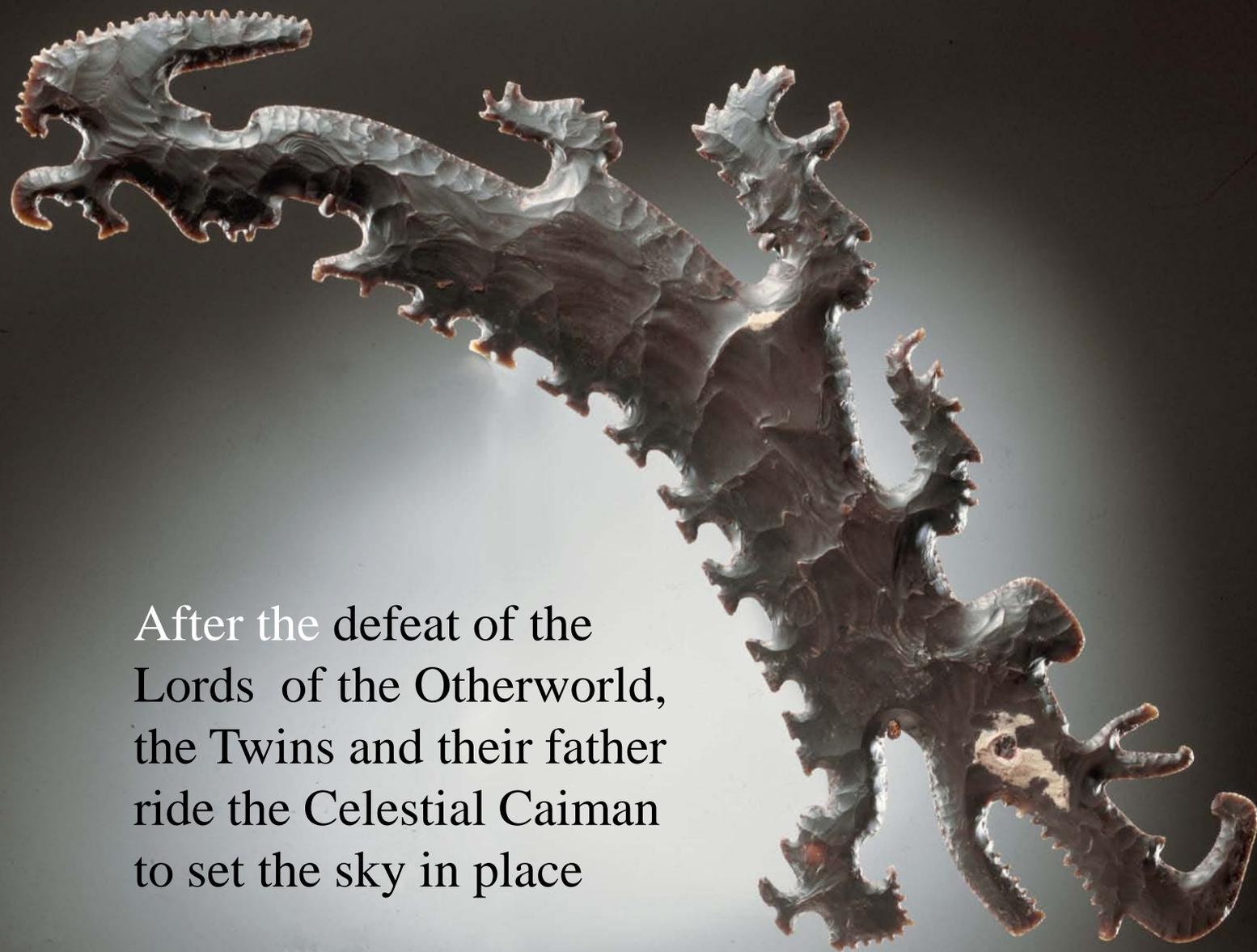




God L pleads to get his hat back, but the Rabbit tells him that his pleas will go unanswered.



K1398



After the defeat of the  
Lords of the Otherworld,  
the Twins and their father  
ride the Celestial Caiman  
to set the sky in place

Hunahpú as  
the  
SUN GOD





**A NEW DAY DAWNS FOR THE MAYA**