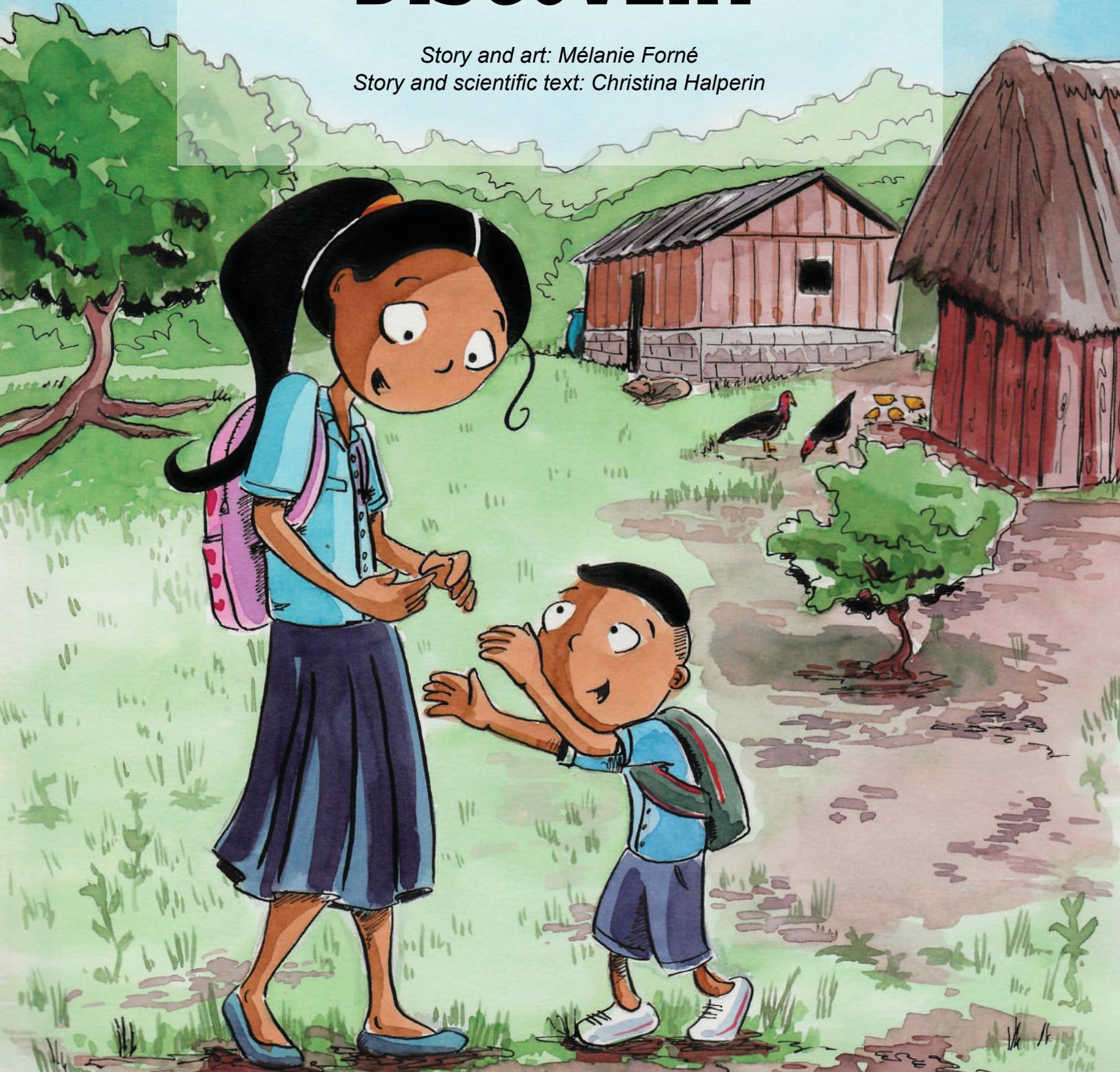


# ANA's DISCOVERY

*Story and art: Mélanie Forné  
Story and scientific text: Christina Halperin*



# ANA'S DISCOVERY





LET ME SEE!

WHAT IS THIS?



ANA, LET ME SEE!

IT LOOKS LIKE A BEAD, FOR A NECKLACE...



SWIPE SWIPE



ANA...

LET ME SEE...



ANA!

I THINK I CLOSED MY EYES FOR ONLY A MOMENT...

...AND WHEN I OPENED THEM...



PAF!

OUCH!



OWW, THAT HURT!

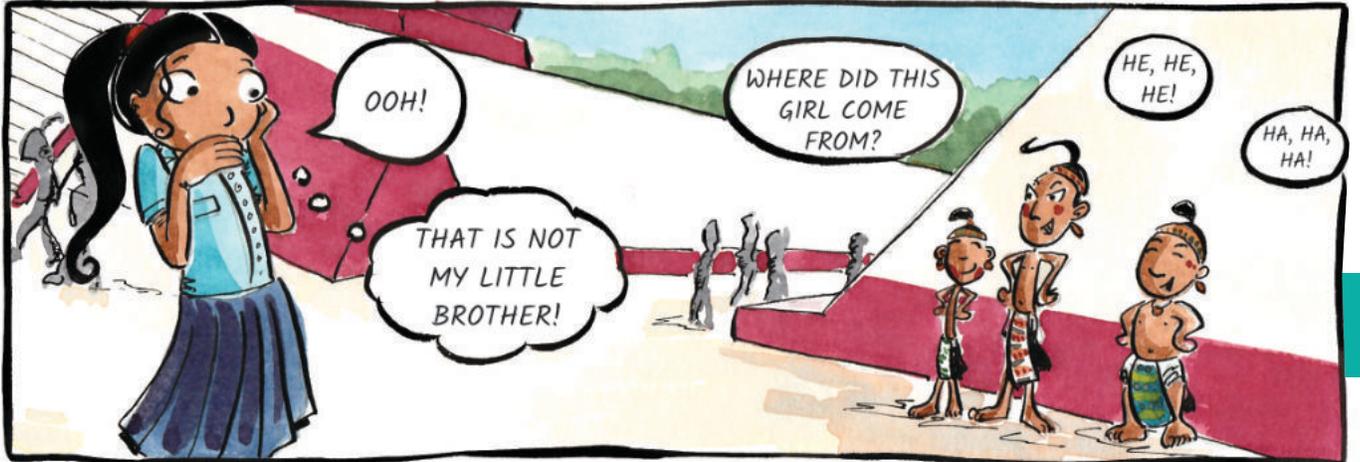
HA, HA, HA!



THAT LITTLE BROTHER OF MINE...



WHAT HAPPENED? WHY DID YOU HIT ME?



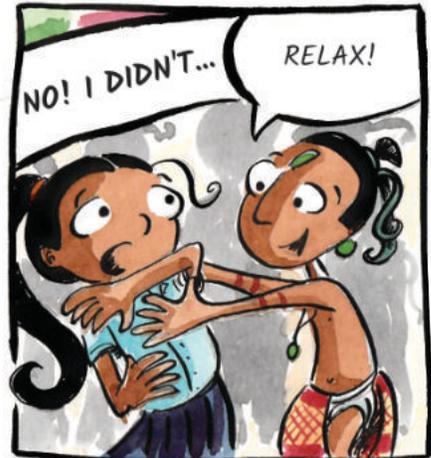
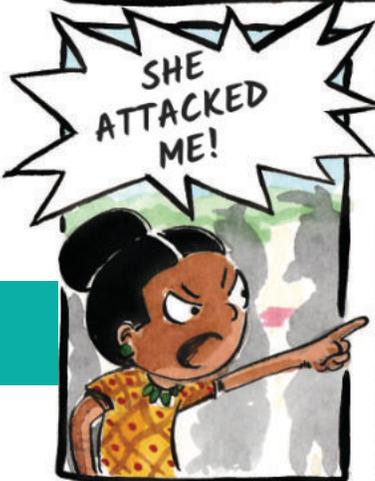
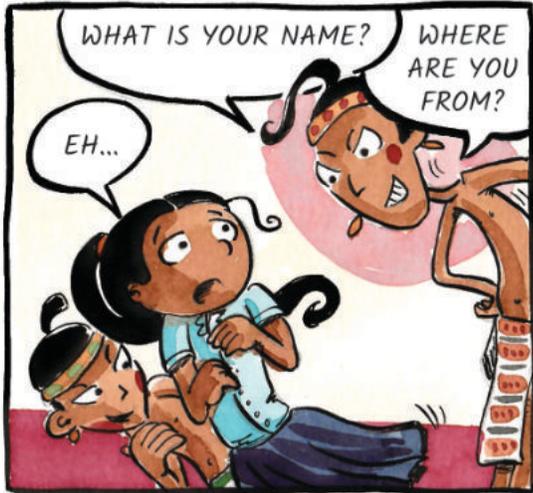
OOH!

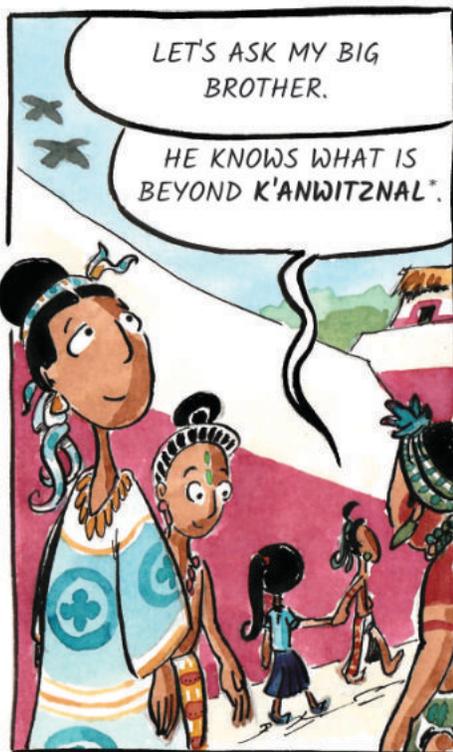
THAT IS NOT MY LITTLE BROTHER!

WHERE DID THIS GIRL COME FROM?

HE, HE, HE!

HA, HA, HA!





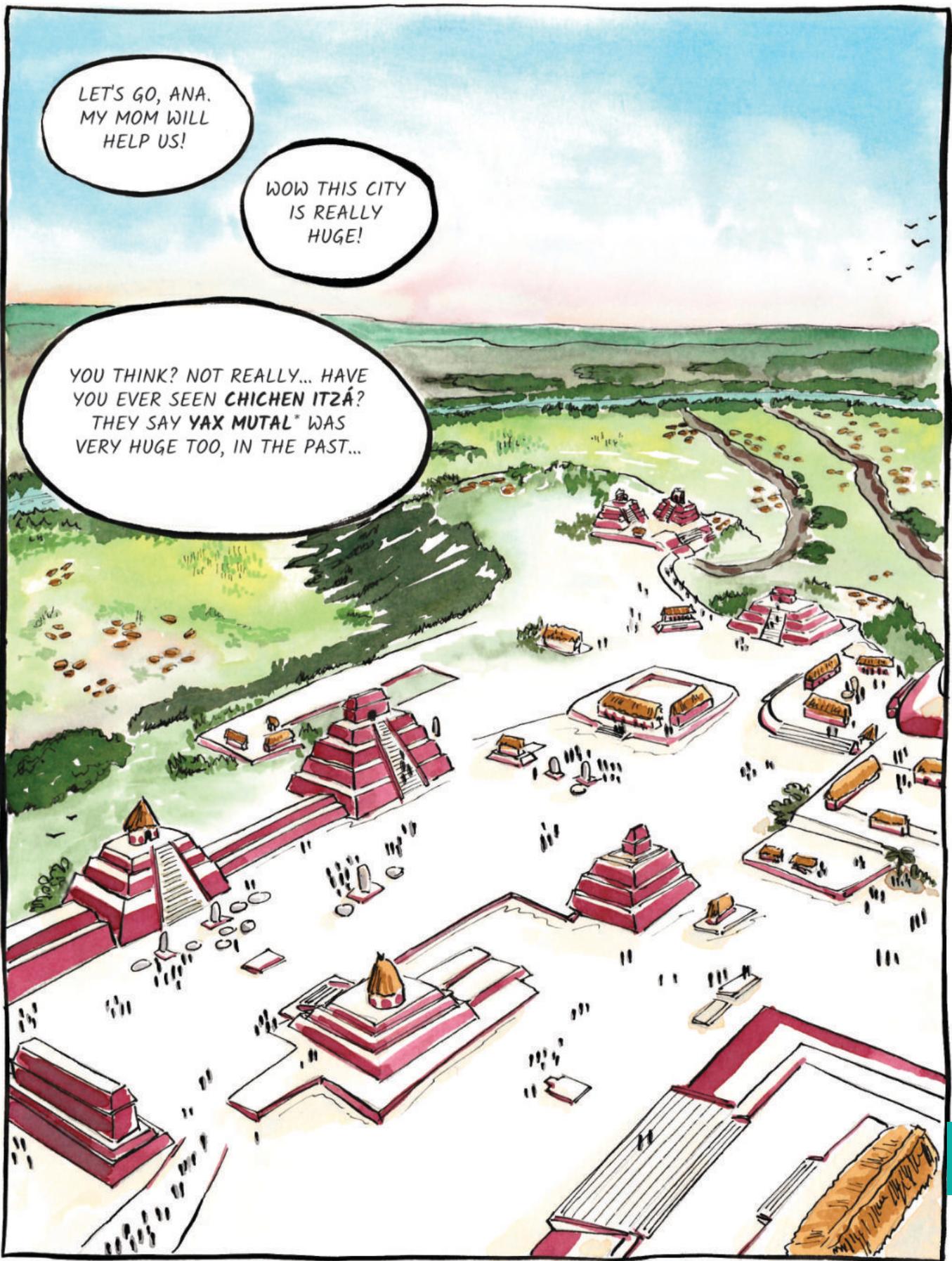
\* NAME OF THE CITY OF UCANAL BASED ON MAYA HIEROGLYPHIC TEXTS.



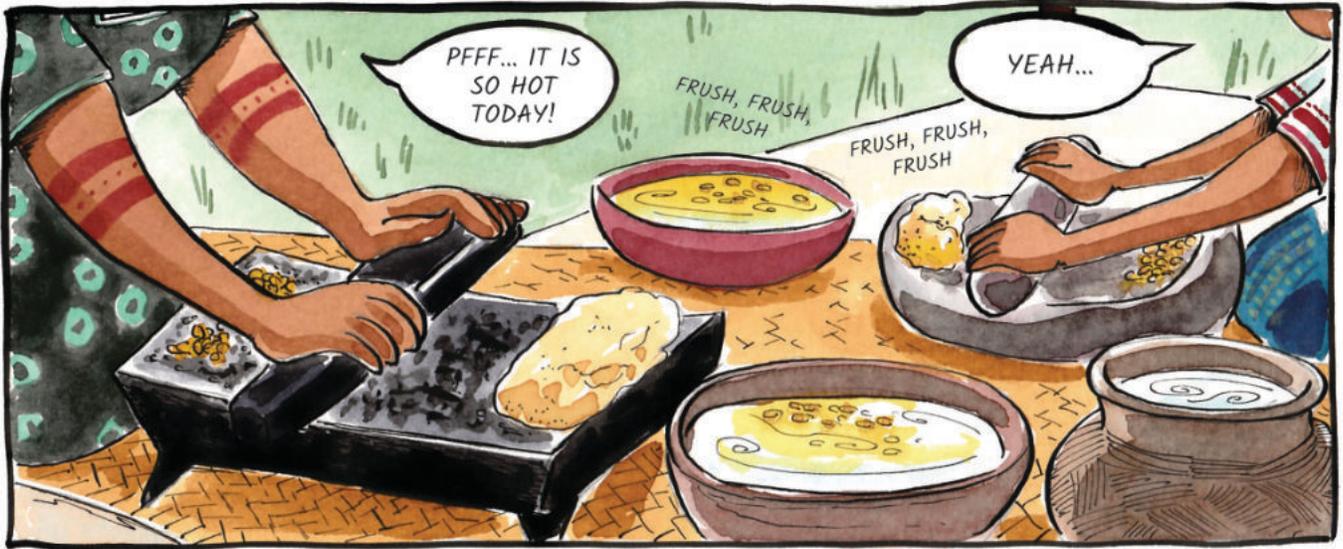
LET'S GO, ANA.  
MY MOM WILL  
HELP US!

WOW THIS CITY  
IS REALLY  
HUGE!

YOU THINK? NOT REALLY... HAVE  
YOU EVER SEEN CHICHEN ITZÁ?  
THEY SAY YAX MUTAL\* WAS  
VERY HUGE TOO, IN THE PAST...



\* MAYA NAME FOR TIKAL.

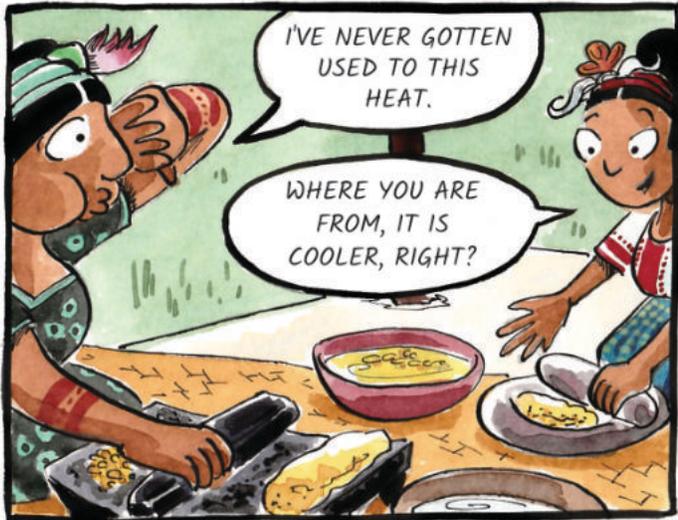


PFFF... IT IS SO HOT TODAY!

YEAH...

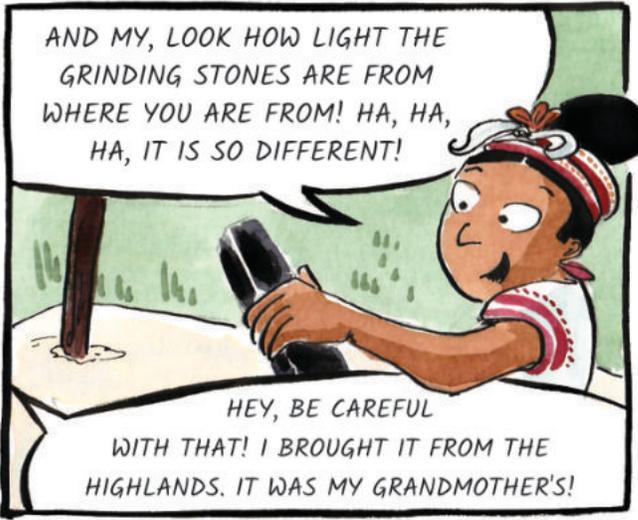
FRUSH, FRUSH, FRUSH

FRUSH, FRUSH, FRUSH



I'VE NEVER GOTTEN USED TO THIS HEAT.

WHERE YOU ARE FROM, IT IS COOLER, RIGHT?



AND MY, LOOK HOW LIGHT THE GRINDING STONES ARE FROM WHERE YOU ARE FROM! HA, HA, HA, HA, IT IS SO DIFFERENT!

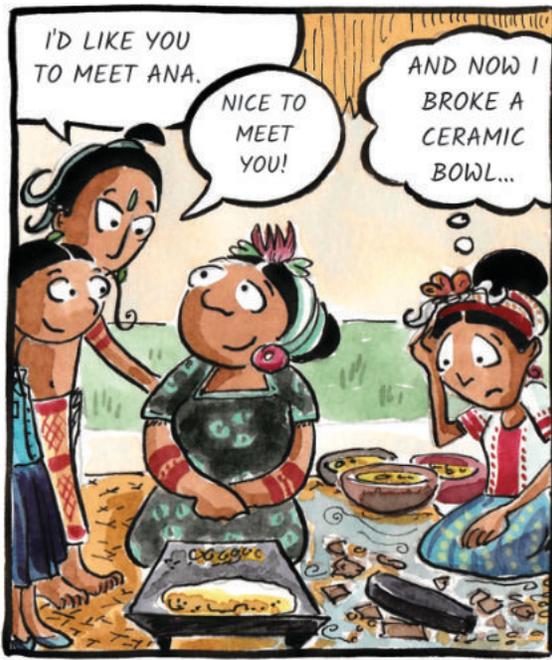
HEY, BE CAREFUL WITH THAT! I BROUGHT IT FROM THE HIGHLANDS. IT WAS MY GRANDMOTHER'S!



MAMAAAAA!

SON?

OOPS!



I'D LIKE YOU TO MEET ANA.

NICE TO MEET YOU!

AND NOW I BROKE A CERAMIC BOWL...



HELLO THERE MY LITTLE T'U'UL. WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

FROM PICHELITO...

BUT I AM LOST...

\* RABBIT.



PICHELITO? MMHHH... I'M  
ORIGINALLY FROM AFAR  
TOO, BUT I DON'T KNOW  
THAT PLACE.

OH.

YOUR AUNT TRAVELS TO MANY  
PLACES TO SELL HER CERAMICS...



GO ASK HER. AND WHILE  
YOU ARE AT IT, PLEASE  
GET ME A NEW BOWL, WE  
JUST BROKE ONE.



AND SO WE LEFT KAN'S HOME. WE PASSED BY SO MANY PEOPLE... THEY ALL  
SEEMED SO STRANGE... WEIRD CLOTHES, DIFFERENT HAIR STYLES....

HELLO!

BUT THEY SURELY WERE NICE AND FRIENDLY!



AUNT SAK  
NIKTE!

?

KAN!  
HOW NICE  
TO SEE YOU!



KAN'S AUNT HADN'T HEARD OF MY LITTLE VILLAGE EITHER.

DON'T CRY  
MY LITTLE  
TU'UL!

IT IS MADE  
OF CLAY....

HERE, THIS LITTLE  
FIGURINE IS FOR YOU.

THANK YOU...  
SNIFF...



YOUR VILLAGE  
MUST BE  
SOMEWHERE!

WHY DON'T YOU ASK  
THE AJAW\*?

AJAW?

\* RULER, KING.



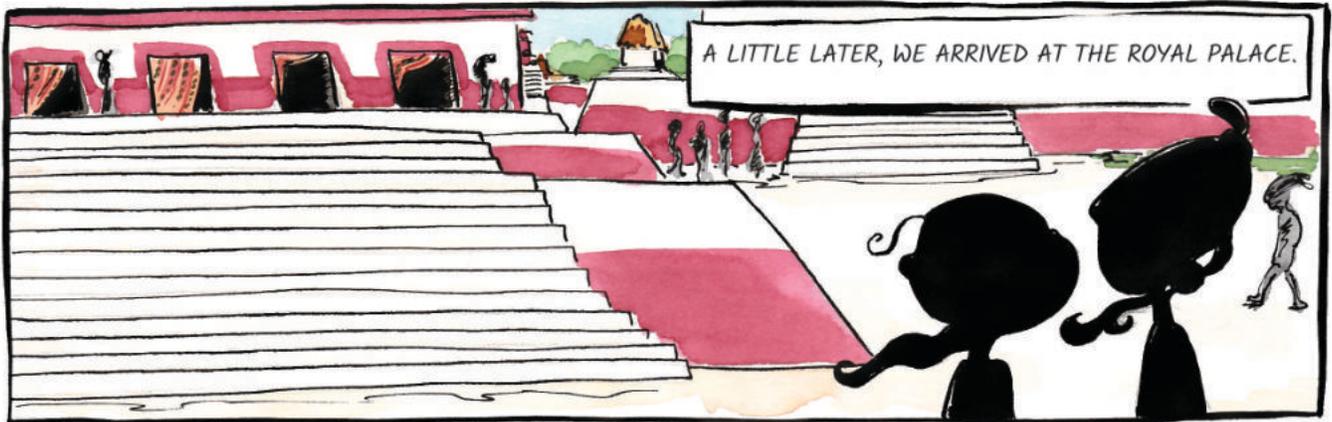
T'U'UL, THE AJAW IS CHOSEN BY THE GODS TO RULE THE CITY AND BEYOND. HE IS WISE AND KIND. HE CAN HELP YOU!



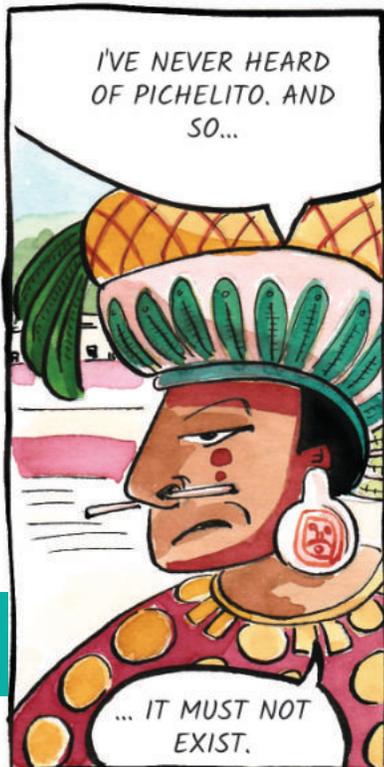
AND GIVE THE CERAMIC BOWL TO YOUR MOM!

THANKS AUNTIE!

OH... SO WE ARE GOING TO SEE THE KING?



A LITTLE LATER, WE ARRIVED AT THE ROYAL PALACE.



I'VE NEVER HEARD OF PICHELITO. AND SO...

... IT MUST NOT EXIST.



GET OUT OF HERE! I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR SUCH NONSENSE.

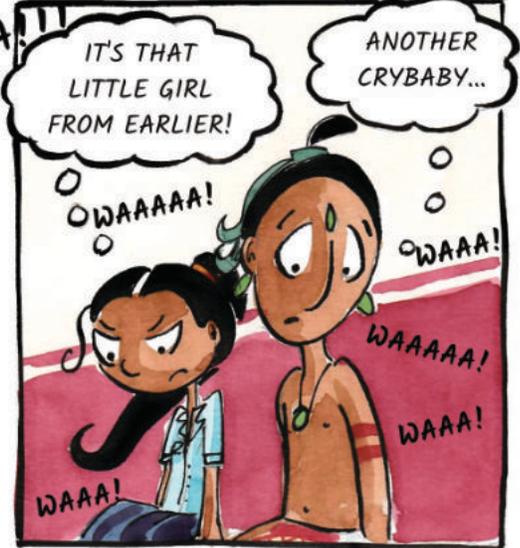


THE AJAW WAS NOT SO FRIENDLY.

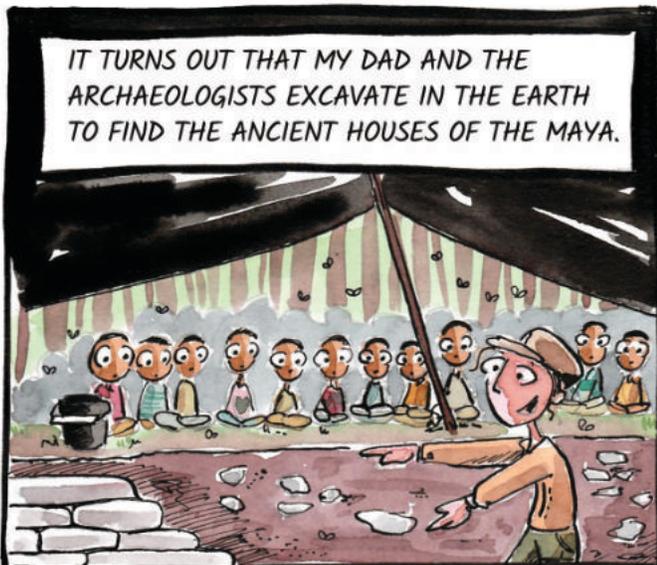
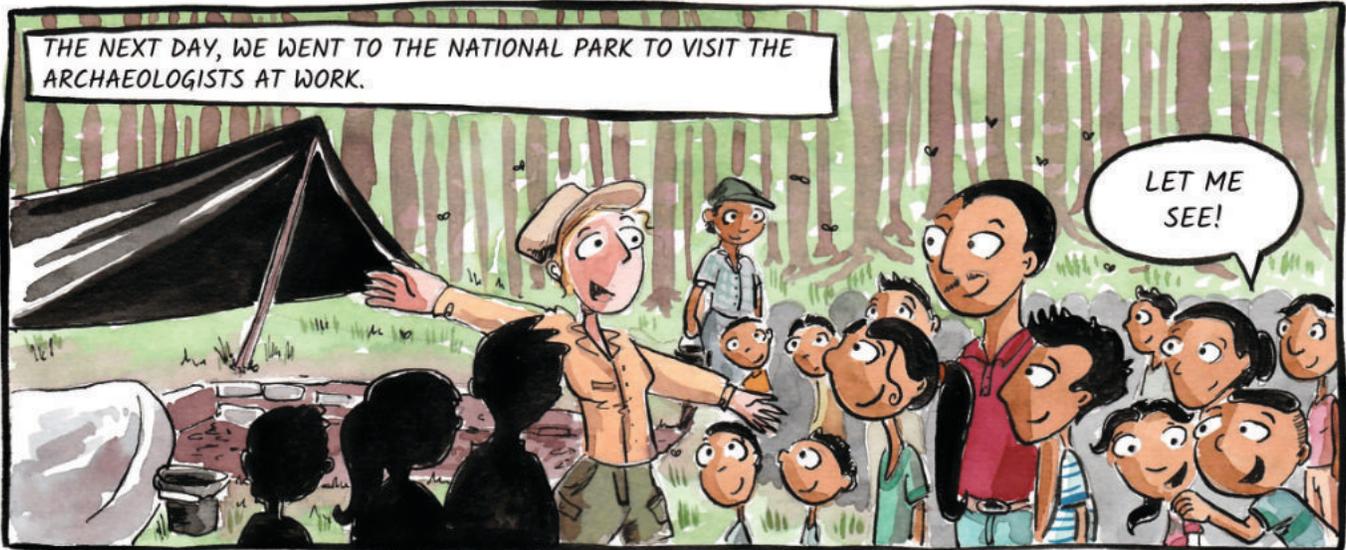
HMM... IS THIS MY BEST PROFILE?

AS FOR ME, I WAS STILL LOST.

SO WE ENDED UP GOING BACK TO KAN'S HOME. ALL HOPE WAS LOST.







# UCANAL

## A BRIEF HISTORY



“UCANAL” WRITTEN  
WITH MAYA GLYPHS

Ancient Maya peoples inhabited many different political capitals, towns, and villages in what is now Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador. Some of the earliest villages in this region emerged **over 3,000 years ago**. The Maya area was linguistically and culturally diverse in ancient times, with people who spoke multiple different Maya languages as well as those who migrated to the region and spoke other Mesoamerican languages. Today, millions of people continue to speak various Maya languages (such as Mopan, Itzaj, Yucatec, Ch’ol, Chontal, Ch’orti’, Tseltal, Tsotsil, Chuj, Tojolabal, Q’eqchi’, Uspantek, Poqom, K’iche’, Kaqchikel, Tz’utujil, Sakapultek, Mam, Tekitek, Awakatek, Ixil), and many more express their Mayan cultural identities and traditions in their everyday lives from what they eat (e.g. tamales, chocolate and corn drinks, squash and bean dishes), the stories they tell, the games they play, the dances they perform during festivals, the way they farm their lands, to the crafts they weave, sculpt, and form.



According to Maya hieroglyphic texts from the Classic period (AD ca. 300-830), the city of Ucanal, located along the Mopan River in eastern Petén, Guatemala, was known as **K’anwitznal**. Although many Classic period cities were partly or largely abandoned at the end of the Classic period, the city of **K’anwitznal** flourished during this time, a period known as the Terminal Classic (AD ca. 830-950). The archaeological research of this ancient city as well as many other archaeological sites throughout the Maya area emphasize that **Maya civilization did not collapse** and that Maya peoples did not disappear at the end of the Classic period or upon arrival of Spanish colonizers. Rather, some political capitals and royal dynasties weakened while others flourished. Throughout thousands of years of history, Maya peoples adapted and reworked their political systems and cultural traditions, a process that continues today.

*The story of Ana is based, in part, on the archaeological research by the Ucanal Archaeological Project, directed by Christina T. Halperin (Université de Montréal) and José Luis Garrido (Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala). Archaeological research at the site is a collaborative effort and involves students and professional archaeologists and specialists from Guatemala, the U.S., and Canada as well as local excavators and project personnel from Petén (Pichelito, La Blanca, San José, San Andres, and Barrio Nuevo San José).*

# WHAT ASPECTS OF ANA'S ADVENTURE ARE BASED ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS?



## THE JADE BEAD

PAGES 2 AND 11

Jade (jadeite) was one of the **most precious stones** of the ancient Maya. It was more precious than gold, which was either absent or not common at Maya sites during the Pre-Columbian period. Excavations at the site of Ucanal reveal that although jade was more prevalent among the larger palatial residences, **even modest families and children** from these families wore necklaces with jade beads. So if you were living at Ucanal, it is possible that you too had a necklace with at least one or two jade beads!



## K'ANWITZNAL

### ANCIENT NAME OF THE CITY

PAGE 4

We know from Maya hieroglyphic texts that the city, and likely the larger region, was known as K'anwitznal, which means "Yellow Hill Place".

Stone monuments from the site itself mention rulers of K'anwitznal. In addition, stone monuments from other political capitals throughout the Maya area mention their interactions with rulers with K'anwitznal royal titles. These interactions were sometimes friendly and were sometimes antagonistic.

YELLOW HILL PLACE  
K'ANWITZNAL

### WHAT did Maya writing record?

The Maya had a **writing system** that could record **all the complexities of speech** (with words as subjects, verbs, and objects; with the use of different rules of grammar). Elite scribes **wrote about the lives of royal kings and queens**, noblemen and noblewomen, ceremonial **events**, **warfare**, the presence and actions of deities, **sacred narratives**, astronomical and calendrical notations, environmental crises, among other things.

Maya hieroglyphic writing was carved into **stone monuments** and portable stone objects, but also painted in **books**, on **ceramic vessels**, on stucco **wall surfaces**, and occasionally on the wall surfaces of **caves**.

When Spanish priests and colonial officials first occupied the Maya area in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, they burned as many Maya books as they could find and **crushed Maya literate traditions**.

Because many **Maya languages are still spoken today**, specialists can incorporate the understandings of contemporary Maya languages into their decipherments of ancient hieroglyphic texts.

**Languages change over time**, so ancient languages are not the same as contemporary ones, but they still **provide important clues to the reading of ancient texts**.



Holy Lord of  
*K'anwitzal*



## Ucanal Stela 4

This monument was found in Plaza A at the site of Ucanal and is currently on display at the Museo de Arqueología y Etnología de Guatemala in Guatemala City. The hieroglyphs highlighted in gray mention royal titles with the *K'anwitzal* sign. Differences in the two glyphs are due to slight spelling differences.

# THE BALLGAME

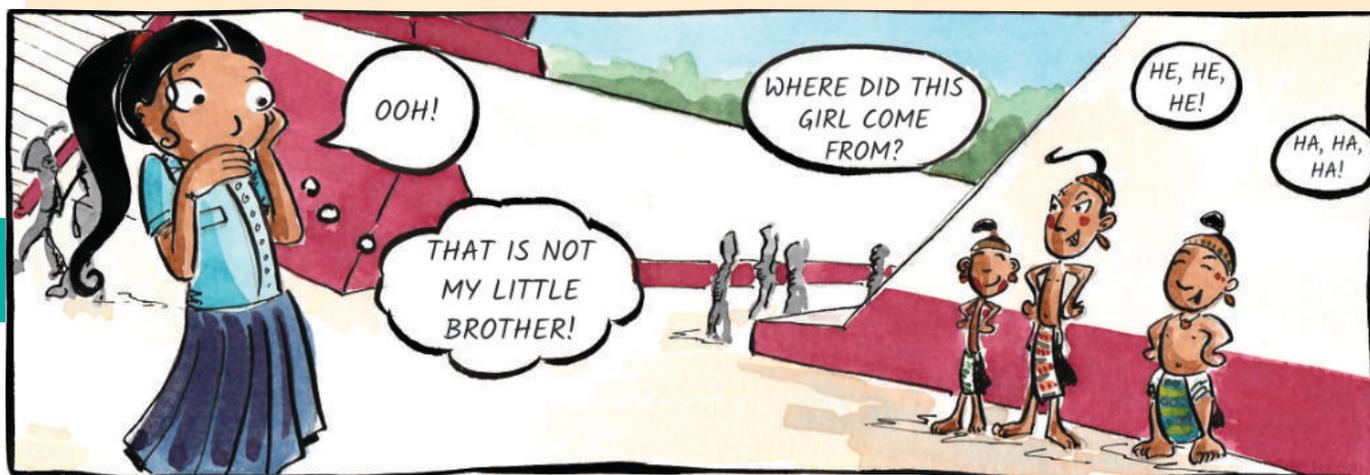
PAGES 2, 3 AND 5



Ancient Maya peoples played different types of ballgames. One of the most famous types of ball game was **piitz or pitz**, a form of hip ballgame in which players form two teams and **use their hips to bounce a rubber ball** from one end of a court to the other. Maya ballcourts had **two, long parallel structures and a central alleyway** where the players ran back and forth to hit the ball.

The site of Ucanal has at least **three ballcourts**. The ballcourt in the story (Ballcourt #1 located in Plaza A) has been excavated by the Ucanal Archaeological Project and was first built at the beginning of the **Terminal Classic period** (likely around AD 800-850). Its central alleyway and end zone were refurbished later in the Terminal Classic period. In other words, while some Maya cities were not building any new public architecture, the inhabitants at Ucanal were engaged in many new public building projects, including one of its ballcourts.

In addition, **it was one of the largest ballcourts in the region** (measuring over 40m long), although not as big as the ballcourt from Chichen Itzá in Mexico nor the one from Nixtun Ch'ich' in Petén, Guatemala. Project excavations found large numbers of riverine snail shells (locally called *jute*), a local delicacy, and ceramic bowls and dishes at the edges of the ballcourt, suggesting that **ballgames may have also been accompanied by feasting**.



## How do archaeologists know what an ancient city looked like if everything is buried underground?

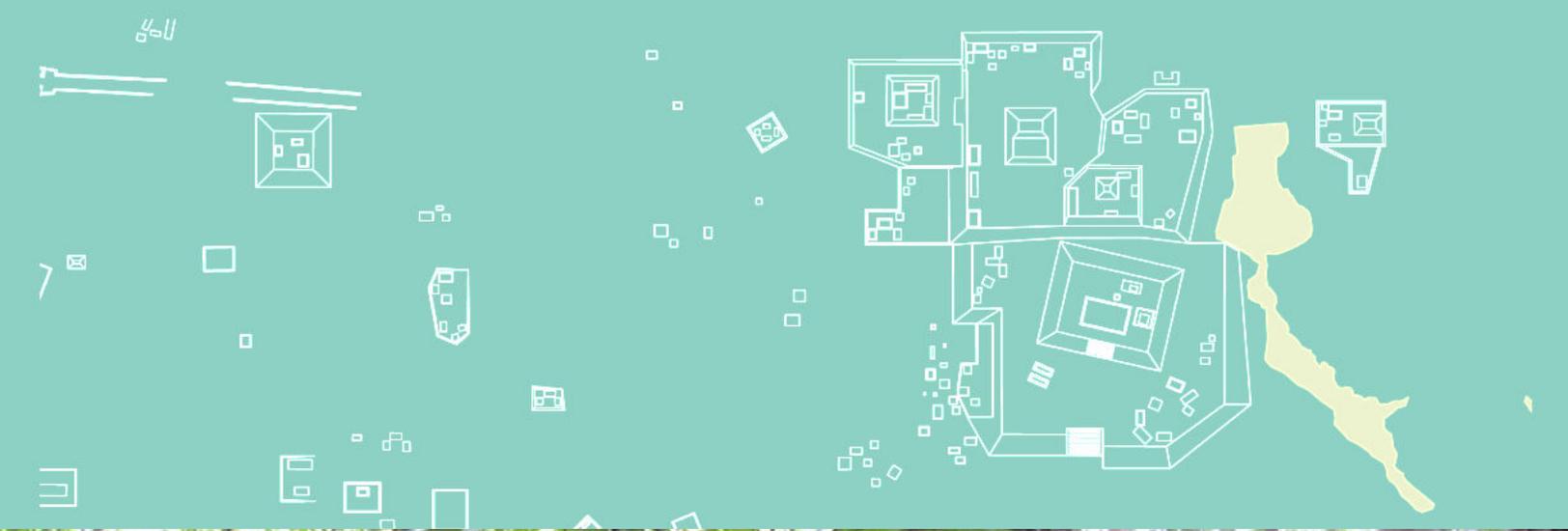
It is impossible to excavate an **entire city or village**. Archaeologists **only excavate a very small portion** of the monuments, buildings, agricultural features, and residences of any given settlement. In the Maya area, many of the residential buildings, agricultural terraces, temple pyramids, and other public architecture form **raised surfaces in the ground**. Even though dirt and trees cover these raised surfaces, archaeologists can identify them from their shapes and sizes. They measure these mounds to create topographic maps.

The view of the city on page 6 is, thus, an **artistic reconstruction** based on the archaeology project's **mapping** of these mounds and an understanding of the architecture based on more limited excavations. The page 6 view of the city encompasses **only part of the city of Ucanal** (from the site's public Plazas A, G, K to the Mopan River). Many more public buildings and plaza spaces spanned a zone of at least 7.5 km<sup>2</sup>, and its larger settlement spanned **a zone over 26 km<sup>2</sup>**.



**Do you see the two channels in the upper right side of the city?**

These channels are **drainage** canals that lead to the Mopan River. The ancient Maya not only had to figure out **how to conserve water during the dry season**, but also **how to manage having too much water during the rainy season**. The Ucanal Archaeological Project excavated the two human-made canals seen in the reconstruction view of the city and found that they were built during the **Terminal Classic period** (AD ca. 830-950), when many other city infrastructure projects were also underway.



## Mapping the site

Mapping the site of Ucanal with a total station or electronic distance measurement (similar to the equipment construction workers use to build and record new roads).

19

0 65 130 Meters

# GRINDING CORN

PAGE 7

Corn, chocolate, and other foodstuffs were ground on flat or curved stones with stone pestles, what are known today as **metates and manos**. Some Maya women continue to use *manos* and *metates* to grind their food to make tamales, tortillas, chocolate drinks, etc. This work is very labor intensive as it takes anywhere **between 3-6 hours a day** to grind enough corn to feed a single family! So for many, the use of mechanical grinding machines are preferred.



Rectangular shape

Rounded edges

The site of Ucanal is located in the hot, semi-tropical Maya Lowlands. In the story, Kan's mother is from the **Highlands of Guatemala** where it is cooler. **Did people from the Highlands of Guatemala really live at Ucanal?**

**KAN's**  
**MOTHER**  
**PAGES 7 AND 8**

Just as people move around a lot today, people in the past also migrated frequently. The Ucanal Archaeology Project has found some *manos* and *metates* made of vesicular basalt, a type of stone produced by volcanoes. **This type of stone is found in the Guatemalan Highlands** where many volcanoes are located. In addition, the *manos* and *metates* of vesicular basalt from Ucanal were shaped in a rectangular form, rather than with more rounded edges. This style of *mano* and *metate* is typical of the Guatemalan Highlands where it continues to be produced in that same style today.

But the presence of an imported object does not necessarily mean that people migrated from that region, as goods may have been exchanged through **traveling merchants**. Nonetheless, chemical analysis of a small sample of human teeth (oxygen and strontium isotope analyses) indicate that people who lived in the city came from a number of different distant regions, including the possibility that at least one person came from the Highlands of Guatemala.

# CERAMIC PRODUCTION AT THE HOUSE OF AUNT SAK NIKTE

PAGE 8

Broken and discarded ceramics are some of the most common artifacts archaeologists find. Once clay is fired, it is very durable and can last even **thousands of years.**

Excavations by the Ucanal Archaeological Project found evidence of **ceramic production at a small residence** (labeled as Group 133). Small excavation units (1x1 m or 0.5x0.5 m) were placed at the outside edges of the buildings to find the trash discarded by household inhabitants. In these **trash deposits**, archaeologists found broken fragments of **figurine molds**, tools used to produce small ceramic figures similar to the one Aunt Sak Nikte gave to Ana on page 8. They also found **clay bowl and figurine fragments** that had been formed, but not yet fired, as well as polishing tools and iron oxide nodules (to give red and black colors to clay) that may have been used by its residents for **making ceramics.**

## Excavations of a Maya house

In this residence (Group 133), ceramic production tools were found.



# THE **AJAW** FROM **K'ANWITZNAL** (THE **UCANAL KING**)

**PAGE 9**

Maya kings and queens often erected **carved stone monuments** of **themselves on important dates**, such as 20 year period calendar celebrations. These stone monuments often recorded the names of the ruler and his or her titles as well as other important **historical events**, such as their birthdates, the dates they acceded to the throne, rituals they participated in, and particular wars they engaged in.



## **Discovery of Stela 29**

The depiction of the king in Ana's adventures comes from a recent monument discovered by the Ucanal Archaeological Project in 2019. Labeled as **Ucanal Stela 29**, the monument **depicts a slim ruler** holding three long darts in his right hand and a dart thrower in his left hand. It dates to the **Terminal Classic period**.

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To read more about the Ucanal Archaeological Project, go to [www.ucanal-archaeology.com](http://www.ucanal-archaeology.com)

Photo credits: Ucanal Archaeological Project - Illustration: Mélanie Forné.

# ANA's DISCOVERY

The school kids from the Guatemalan village of Pichelito are going to visit the nearby archaeological site of Ucanal, what was once a large, ancient Maya city. Ana, a 10 year old girl from Pichelito, however, has her own adventure to the site of Ucanal. After she finds a jade bead, an object that likely belonged to one of the ancient inhabitants of Ucanal over 1,000 years ago, she finds herself in the ancient city itself! Although she meets many of the ancient city's residents, will she ever find her way back home to Pichelito?

*The story of Ana is based, in part, on the archaeological research by the Ucanal Archaeological Project, directed by Christina T. Halperin (Université de Montréal) and José Luis Garrido (Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala). Research by the project (2014-present) is conducted in collaboration with the community of Pichelito, a village located on and adjacent to the site of Ucanal, and with the permission of the Dirección General del Patrimonio Cultural y Natural de Guatemala.*

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