THE STORY OF LÄY AND GISAJ
A Zapotec Sun and Moon Myth

MORRIS and CAROL STUBBLEFIELD
Instituto Lingüístico de Verano

The following was dictated to us in 1966 by Jerónimo Quero who resides in San Pablo Mitla, Oaxaca, Mexico. The Mitla dialect of Zapotec includes four towns in the eastern Oaxaca valley.

The story attempts to account for the first corn used in making tortillas, the first use of tools, and the first children who later in the story became the sun and the moon. It also brings the children into contact with "the real god" who tells them their future. The people very likely connect the snake in the story, who is the children's god-father, with the seven snake heads of natural rock formation found along the trail from Mitla to Santo Domingo Albarradas. One snake has a complete body which is about four feet long.

The orthography is phonemic. Two like vowels occurring together signify laryngealization. A stroke (') following a consonant denotes fortisness. All consonants contiguous to the voiceless, indeterminate, non-syllabic vocoid /j/, are voiceless. The /ç/, /ʃ/, /ts/, and /dz/ are affricates. The Spanish system of marking questions is used in order not to confuse the glottal sentence final with the question mark. The /ɾ/ is the Spanish flap r except in Spanish loan words where it is either a flap or a trill.
The Story of Lāy and Gisaj

1. will-listen-you story of old-woman-Lāy-this with of old-man-Gisaj, who was first in the world. 2. well old-man-Gisaj-this all time-just lying-on-back-he mouth one-cave. 3. well old-woman-Lāy-this passing-great-she suffering goes-leaves- she what-to-eat old-man-Gisaj-this because thirteen times, thirteen times goes what-to-eat old-man-Gisaj-this one-day. 4. well then old-woman-Lāy-this found-heart-her, found-heart-her how-cooked corn-cooked, made-her invention how-cooked corn-cooked. 5. after that same her makes-she clothes-she, makes-she her-belt-she, makes-she everything what needs-she.

6. but once went-they mouth ocean, both-of-them. 7. went both-of-them mouth ocean. 8. when saw old-man-Gisaj-this

Free Translation

Listen to the story of the old woman called Lāy and the old man called Gisaj who were the first in the world. Gisaj spent all his time lying in the entrance of a cave. And Lāy was suffering great because she was carrying food to Gisaj who ate 13 times a day. One day Lāy discovered how to cook corn. This was her invention. After this she discovered how to make clothes, her belts, and everything she needed.

One day they both went to the ocean shore. Gisaj saw a box coming
coming one-box on-ocean. 9. when came-out-it said-he, “one-box coming on-ocean.” 10. then said-she, “go-take-out-it let’s-see what-there-is, let’s-see what-is in box! 11. when came-out box all on-ocean-this when saw-they coming two children there. 12. then said, “two children coming in here,” said-he. 13. then happy-hearts-much-they then because well, not is children-they then, were-they people-barren like this no is children-they 14. suffering going-through. 15. then said-he, “children-this will-help-much children-these us,” said-he. 16. “these shall-be children-us,” said-he. 17. then growing-he children-these. 18. children-these help-her going-to-take what-to-eat old-man-Gisaj-this lying-he.

19. was-there- until other person gave bad advice-he. 20. one-lier said-he, “you children,” said, “going-through-much-you suffering for mister-little-that,” said, “not your-dad-not-we-he,” said-he. 21. “how-know-you not our-dad-not-us-he?” said-he, towards them on the ocean. Then Lāy told Gisaj to get the box. Let’s see what is in the box. When they took out the box, there were two children coming out of it. They had happy hearts because they did not have any children. They were barren. Since they were suffering so much, they thought the children would be able to help them. Gisaj said, “these will be our children.” These children grew and helped Lāy take food to Gisaj who spent his time lying down.

There was another person who gave bad advice. “You children are going through a lot of suffering for a person that is not even your father.” “How
to mister-this coming-growing-us,” said-he, “how-not-he be our-father us?” 22. “not-he be your-father I know-well-I not your-father-not you-he.”


30. when clears-night went-through-they there where standing-also person-this. 31. gave person-this some egg to-him. 32. then said-he, “first egg-this will-throw-you-it head-he, old-man-Gisaj-this,” said-he. 33. then rest-those will-throw-you head-he. 34. well that's enough egg-that died person-this. 35. well while died person-this then-it. 36. said-he, “when already-died person-this,” said-he, “then will-take-out-you will-take-im-

---

do you know that he is not our father? He raised us, is he not our father?” they asked. The man said that he knew very well that he was not their father. “Stop by my house and I will tell you how to be free of this suffering.” “What shall we do,” they asked, “if he is not our father then this suffering is worthless?” “Stop by tomorrow,” he said.

When daylight came, they went to where this person was. He gave them eggs and said, “Throw the first egg at Gisaj’s head and the rest at his body.


Immediately-you heart-he,” said-he. 37. “will-take-out-you heart-he,” said-he. 38. “after that will-take-out-you heart-he,” said-he, “will-fill-up-you red-wasp in his-stomach-he.” 39. will-do-you stuff his-stomach-he. 40. then will-take-you heart person-this will-tell-you to-your-mother-you that my-father-I killed one-deer therefore will-make-you one-meal will-eat-we. 41. “yes,” said-he, “will-take-I-it.”

42. when arrived-he then said-he, “mother,” said-he, “neither-know-you,” said-he, “our-father-us killed-he one-deer.” 43. “now heart deer-this,” said-he, “brought-I-it will-make-you-it one-meal,” said-he. 44. “yes,” said-she, “not-is-not,” said-she. 46. “later will-make-I-it,” said-she. 47. went-quickly person-this went mouth-river went-wash-she corn-socked-this. 48. when arrived-she to-river when said frog to-her, “kaw, kaw,” said-it. 49. then-it what says animal-this like-this. 50. when said-again

That is enough to kill him. When you have killed him, take out his heart and fill him with red wasp. Take his heart and tell your mother that your father killed a deer. Have her prepare a meal for you with it.”

They went to their mother and told her that their father had killed a deer. They had taken out its heart for her to use in making a meal for them. Ląy said that she would make it later. She ran to the river to wash the corn meal. At the river a frog called out to her and said, “Are you going to eat the heart
53. če bidzujnni jej räjpni, "¿kontu?" räjpni.

frog-this, "kaw, kaw," said-he. 51. "can be then," said frog-this, "same you will-eat-you heart husband-you?" 52. there-it told old-woman-Läy-this said-it, "well children-these," said-she, "is-maybe what-already-done children-these his-father-he," said-she.
53. when arrived-she then said-she, "where-you?" said-she. 54. "go see-we where-your-father-you," said-she. 55. "where-your-father-you?" 56. "when coming-you where-your-father-you?" said-she. 57. "where-our-father-we lying?" said. 58."good now go-see-we where your-father-you," said-she.
59. when arrived-she, lying-facing person-this. 60. "why lying your-father-you?" said-she. 61. "who-knows not-us know," said-he. 62. "when brought-we what-eat-he," said-he, "well was-lying-he-up," said-he. 63. "not-us know," said-he. 64. "but how-not-you know?" said-she. 65. "that you tomorrow-tomorrow

of your husband?" Then Läy imagined what was done and said, "The children must have done something to their father."

When she arrived back to where the children were, she said, "Let's go see where your father is. Where was your father when you left him and came to me? Let's go see your father."

When they arrived, their father was lying face down. Läy asked, "Why is your father lying in that position?" "we do not know," they said. "When we brought him his food he was lying face up. We do not know," they said. "You
coming-to-take-you what-eat-he,” said-she. 66. “well,” said, “will-see-I let’s-see what that happen your-father-you,” said-she. 67. then turned-over old-woman-Läy-this old-man-Gisaj-this. 68. then came-out red-wasp-this stung-it old-woman-Läy was old-woman-Läy knocked-down had children-these time ran hour-that. 69. when-it ran children-these then said-she,” “children-these already-know-he how-died husband-I,” said. 70. for-something ran children-these went-they. 71. “going-give-I news my-god-father-I,” said-she, “how-happened.” 72. “going-give-I news compadre,” said-she, “husband-I already-died,” said-she. 73. when arrived-she, “where-you compadre?” said-she. 74. “I coming-give-I news to you, for what happened compadre-you,” said-she. 75. “what-happened my-compadre-I bad,” said. 76. neither know-you,” said-she, “coming-I-with one-word-large will-hear ears-you,” said-she. 77. “what-maybe-that?” 78. “your-

come day after day to bring his food, why do not you know?” she asked. “Well, I will see what happened to your father.”

Then Läy turned Gisaj over. Red wasp stung her and knocked her down and the children ran away. When the children ran away, she said, “Those children knew how my husband died. “I am going to tell my compadre that my husband is dead.”

When she arrived she asked, “Where are you compadre? I am coming to give you the news. I am bringing real bad news.” “What is it?” he said. “Your
The Story of Lāy

89. “mbajy ñnaj,” rājp, “palnajlu zik ñabažuun re-byuuz ro?k rkiin regirdoob štenlu maal, kooblù re-
compadrè-you died,” said-she. 79. “how-will-died my-compadrè-I?” said-she. 80. “person-healthy, person-strong, my-compadrè-I, how-will-die-he?” said-she. 81. “died-he,” said-she, “going-see-we,” said-she. 82. “where children there not every day is children going-to-take what-eat-he?” said-he. 83. “well now,” said she, “when came-I with children-these one-heart deer,” said-she,” “then went-I mouth-river said frog said, ‘kaw, kaw,’” 84. “then it told-immediately-I same I-going eat-I heart husband-I,” said-she. 85. then said to-children, “going-see-we where-your father-you,” said-she. 86. “then arrived-I there already-died person-this.” 87. “well stung red-wasp-this-I,” then-it said-I, “now know-you how-died your-father-you,” said-she. 88. “well there children-these ran-he then,”

89. “well now,” said, “if-say-you like that already-ran children compadrè is dead.” “How can a strong healthy compadrè die?” he asked. “Let’s go see,” she said. “Where are the children? Don’t they take him food everyday?.. he asked. “The children came with the heart of a deer. But when I went to the river, a frog said that I was going to eat the heart of my husband. I returned to the children and told them that we were going to see their father. When we arrived there, he was already dead. Red wasp stung me when I rolled him over. I told the children that they knew how their father died. Then the children ran away.”

“Well now if you say that your children have run away, why don’t you use
there need this-stone-suck your-of-you god-mother, suck-you children-these,” said-he. 90. so-that let’s-see what-punishment will-give-we children-these,” said-he. 91. time when sucked-she child-this because stone-sucked-this immediately came-back children for after again. 92. “see god-father,” said-she. 93. “now will-do-we punishment children-these.” 94. “why do children-these, will-fall-he kind of thought-this will-kill-he my-compadre-I,” said-she. 95. “yes, compadre,” said-she, “nothing-is-not will-do-we punishment-it.” 96. “now I will-tell-I to-him go-bring-he some wood in-order will-burn-we sweat-house.” 97. “in sweat-house-that will-kill-we-he,” said-she, “because that dserves will-do-it,” said-she. 98. “yes nothing-is-not.” 99. when-it said-she, “go-get-you some wood child-I so-that will-enter-I one-sweat-house-this because getting-sick-I.” 100. “nothing-is-not, well mother, go-get-it, if-say-you-like that, go-get-it.”


When he arrived with the wood he had already told his sister what his mother would do. The boy went into the sweat-house drilled-he one-hole bottom sweat-house. 102. then said-he, “maybe will-kill our-parents-us because in sweat-house will-be-we,” said. 103. “good, well now,” said, “go-with-us some maguey-leaves,” said-he, “when will-arrive-we,” said, “first maguey-leaves-this will-throw-I in sweat-house,” said-he. 104. “then will-say-she will-enter-we,” said-he. 105. then will-go-I in-that. 106. “I will-come-out-I in other-side where drilled-I hole, there will-come-out-quickly-I,” said-he. 107. “when will-follow-immediately-you I,” said he.

108. when went-in child-this man-this in sweat-house then came-out-quickly other-side for bottom sweat-house follow-quickly girl-little-this-he. 109. then began maguey-leaves- this banging. 110. “all this thought that fall-you, fall-you thought killed-you your-father-you,” well now said-she, “there also- pay it now so
much that thought that fall-you.” 111. “look how-thundering head-this children-this god-father,” said-she. 112. then came-out her-compadre-she said, “that is-doing what deserving children-these, thundering brain-head.

113. then came-out-quickly old-woman-Läy went-to-see where her-belongings-she, her-machete-weaving-she that do-with-her work. 114. then arrived-she, no her-machete-she where is her-machete-she is-kept her-machete-she no is her-mirror-she, no it comb no-it. 115. then said-she, “neither know you compadre,” said-she, “my-belongings-I no-is,” said-she. 116. “well will-see-we in sweat-house let’s-see-we,” said, “where children,” said. 117. when saw-they where children. 118. “is maguey-leaves-it thunder head-it,” said-he. 119. thundering head maguey-leaves-those. 120. “who-children-these?” said-he, “maybe devil-children-these.” 121. “seen now already-come-out children.” 122. “not kill their father were being repaid them. “Compadre, look how the heads of the children are thundering,” she said. Then her compadre said, “these were deserving children, their brains are banging.”

Then Läy went to get her belongings, her weaving needle that she used in her work. But she could not find her weaving needle, her mirror, nor her comb. Then she told her compadre that she could not find her things. “Let’s go to the sweat house and see if the children are there.” When they looked in the sweat house, they saw only maguey leaves banging. “These children must be of the
The Story of Lay


is-just children-these who thundering head-he," said. 123. "ma- guey-leaves-these-it!"

124. well because children-these made-it prepare stone-suck so-that filled-he chile in stone-suck. 125. chiles-dry filled-he. 126. "then comadre," said-he, "have apparatus your-of-you stone- suck," said-he. 127. then will-suck-we children-these," said-he, "in-order there know-we what-punishment will-give-we other," said-he. 128. sucked old-woman-Lay-this in stone-throw-this so-when climb chile-that head-her about to-die-her. 129. "now," said-she, "children-these," said-she, "already-made children-these gain I, because can be devil-maybe is children-these." 130. "look already-spoiled-they." 131. "not more will-do-I," said-she, because already stone-suck of-mine-I not-more it will-do work for I," said-she. 132. "when I will-do-I arrange with children- these comadre," said-she. 133. "with me will-arrange-it."

devil because the children have already come out and only the maguey leaves are left banging." Now the children had already filled the stone suck with hot dry chile. Then the god-father told her that she had a stone suck, suck the children so that they would know what punishment to give them. Lay sucked the stone but the chile went into her head so that she almost died. Now she said, "these children have already beat me, they must be of the devil. What can I do? My stone suck does
58

Tlalocan

gak reglaadni.” 134. kom šmbaalni, tebål’duš najk šmbaalni. 135. pues če birii šmbaalni jej, “čanalá re-
byuužre,” räjpni.


134. because her-compadre-she was one-snake-great is her-compadre-she. 135. then when came-out her-compadre-she then, “going-follow-I children-these,” said-he.

136. well because children-these already-went-with-he the-machetes-these, already-went-with-he the-wood- knows-night-these, already-went-with-he comb, already-went-with-he mirror-this. 137. when saw-he said-he, “her-compadre our-mother-we coming-follow us,” said-he. 138. “how-it will-do-we?” said-he. 139. when threw-they machete-this, made machete-this one-lake-great, made machete-this. 140. there made snake-this diverted while-they made-more-he advance other-few. 141. after that when made snake-this gain came-out-it in-lake-this, 142. when saw-he, already-snake-this coming-following-again. 143. “now look now yes maybe will-eat snake-this us.” 144. “now know-we what will-be this become wood-knows-night.” when threw-he wood-knows-night was wood-knows-night-this one-vine-great.

not work for me any more.” The godfather said that he would take care of that. He would arrange it because he, the compadre, was a big snake. Then her compadre said that he was going to follow the children.

The children had taken the machete, the weaving needle, the comb, and the mirror with them. When the children saw the snake coming they said, “Our mother’s compadre is following us. What shall we do?” They threw the machete and it became a great lake. This made the snake go around the lake while they
There was snake-this divert while they made-more-they advance more beyond straight, went-they. When saw-they already-coming-follow-again snake-this behind again. When threw-he comb-this was comb-this other vine more-this this more compressed made comb-this. Made-it one-vine great compact. “Well now,” said-he, “helping all belongings of our-mother-we us.” “Well now will-do-we advance.” When saw-they already mirror-only going-with-they. Already near-little-close already-coming-snake. “Now yes,” said-he, “not-more have-not-we,” said-he. “Now yes will-eat snake-this us.” “Well,” said-he, “last-only mirror-this have-I know-we what will-help mirror-this us.” “If will-help mirror-this us, they yes already-done-we gain,” said-he. “So-that is-not now yes will-eat snake-this.” When threw-they mirror-this well continued to move forward. Soon the snake rounded the edge of the lake. Now the children were sure the snake would eat them. But they threw the needle and it became a great vine. The snake was once more delayed for a while but soon he was following them again. Now they threw the comb and it became a greater vine. Now they knew that the belongings of their mother were helping. They went a little farther. Now all they had left was the mirror. Now the snake was coming again. The only thing left to do was to see if the mirror
could help them or if the snake was going to eat them. They threw the mirror and it became a great fire with the snake being in the middle. It killed the snake. Now they were safe again.

As they walked along, the little girl got tired and thirsty. They arrived at a little well and she drank a little water. The well quickly dried up. The little girl said that she could not stand to be thirsty. Maybe if she made a sacrifice more water would come into the well. But what kind of a sacrifice would do!
The Story of Lāy

She would sacrifice one of her eyes and maybe another mouth full of water would come out of the well.

She was getting ready to take out one of her eyes when an old man arrived there. “What are you going to do child?” he asked. Then she said, “I cannot stand to be thirsty, so I am going to sacrifice one of my eyes so that another mouth full of water will come out of the well.” “Do not do that,” he said, “because if you do, you are lost. But you are destined to be the moon and shine in the night and your brother is to be the sun and shine in the day,” he said. “You are lying” she said, “how do you know what we will be?” “You are destined for it,”
räjpni, “kom ?anajktu destinado, narä kaniä ni?p k gaktu,”
gakä bäy,” räjpni, “bisyanä gak gubijj šetna?p?kdi,” räjpni,
räjpni. 187. “čušluj?” räjpni. 188. jejk birii daad
bengoolre räjp, “pues narä nakä gebdyooz,” räjpni.
189. “kaninää la?tu,” räjpni, “?anajktu destinado.”
190. “šetnajkti,” räjpni. 191. pues nikti najk ?istoria
šte bäy kon šte gubijj. 192. nikti najk ?istor bätzni nanä.

already-are-you destined, I am talking-I that will-be-you,” said-he.
184. “are-you destined for that,” said-he. 185. “well,” said-he,
“if true-you will-be-we-it.” 186. “true-you will-be-I moon,”
said-she, “brother-I will-be sun not-is-not,” said-she, “if already-
be-we destined for that, not-is-not will-be-we-it,” said-she.
187. “who-you?” said-she. 188. then came-out mister person-
old-this said, “well-I am-I real-god,” said-he. 189. “am-talking-I
you,” said-he, “already-are-you destined. 190. “not-is-not.”
said-she. 191. well that is story of sun, of moon with of sun.
192. that is story little-that know-I.

he said. “Well if it is true,” she said, “that I am destined for the moon and my
brother is destined for the sun, well it does not matter. “Who are you?” she
asked. Then this old person said, “I am the real god. I am talking to you. You
are destined,” he said. “It does not matter,” she said. That is the story I know
about the sun and the moon.