THE PLUMED SERPENT RESCUES A MAN

R. E. LONGACRE
Instituto Lingüístico de Verano

Geologically the Trique speaking region of Oaxaca is limestone cavern country. One striking topographical feature is a number of perpendicular pits of great depth. The Triques associate both caverns and pits with the supernatural. Caverns are termed du₃kwa₂ du₃wi₃ ‘houses of the lightning.’ The term du₃wi₃ ‘lightning’ is used of the pre-Columbian rain deity (Highland Mixtec sau/savi ‘rain’). With the rain and fertility of the soil is associated the zu₃kwa₂¹ du₃wi₃ ‘lightning serpent’—which is, apparently, the omnipresent Mesoamerican plumed serpent. It is believed that when a lightning serpent comes to live in a shallow lake in a region then there will be abundant rainfall that year. But if people are careless and waste corn the serpent will be offended and leave, thus causing several years of drought.

In the legend here transcribed the lightning serpent is associated with a deep perpendicular pit not far from the present church and school house in San Andrés Chicahuaxtla. The serpent here defends the wronged, rewards virtue, and punishes violence. The legend stresses the expensiveness of the serpent’s plumage.

This text was dictated to me in 1949 by Sra. Rosa de Sandoval a bilingual speaker of Trique of San Andrés Chicahuaxtla. The pronoun system is that of a woman speaker; the pronoun system used by men is quite different.

114
The Plumed Serpent

TEXT

1. nga\textsuperscript{43} na\textsuperscript{2} gi\textsuperscript{r}a\textsuperscript{34}p ngo\textsuperscript{4} zi\textsuperscript{3} na\textsuperscript{3}?u\textsuperscript{4} ni\textsuperscript{3}k\textsuperscript{3} d\textsuperscript{4}h za\textsuperscript{y}yu\textsuperscript{4}3 gi\textsuperscript{3}?ya\textsuperscript{h} ni\textsuperscript{3}k\textsuperscript{4}h. 2. da\textsuperscript{3}d\textsuperscript{4}h zi\textsuperscript{3} wa\textsuperscript{34} zi\textsuperscript{3}gi\textsuperscript{c}a\textsuperscript{36}p ni\textsuperscript{3}p d\textsuperscript{4}h. ni\textsuperscript{3} da\textsuperscript{3}ga\textsuperscript{3}ni\textsuperscript{34} du\textsuperscript{3}gwi\textsuperscript{34}p ngwi\textsuperscript{3}h-i\textsuperscript{3}. 3. nga\textsuperscript{43} ni\textsuperscript{4} ni\textsuperscript{3}k\textsuperscript{4}h-a\textsuperscript{3} ni\textsuperscript{3}k\textsuperscript{4}a\textsuperscript{4}-a\textsuperscript{3} ga\textsuperscript{3}?a\textsuperscript{34}h-a\textsuperscript{3} du\textsuperscript{3}\textsuperscript{3}wa\textsuperscript{3} yu\textsuperscript{3}?u\textsuperscript{4}h yu\textsuperscript{12}. ga\textsuperscript{3}?a\textsuperscript{4}h ni\textsuperscript{4}?yo\textsuperscript{3} d\textsuperscript{4}h wa\textsuperscript{34} yu\textsuperscript{3}?u\textsuperscript{4}h yu\textsuperscript{12}. 4. da\textsuperscript{3}d\textsuperscript{4}h zi\textsuperscript{3} u\textsuperscript{3}ta\textsuperscript{3} ru\textsuperscript{3}wa\textsuperscript{3}h gi\textsuperscript{3}ni\textsuperscript{34}i\textsuperscript{2}1 d\textsuperscript{4}h wa\textsuperscript{3}h ta\textsuperscript{34}h ni\textsuperscript{3} da\textsuperscript{3}h gu\textsuperscript{3}ni\textsuperscript{3} ni\textsuperscript{3}ka\textsuperscript{4}-a\textsuperscript{3}. 5. nga\textsuperscript{43} ni\textsuperscript{4} gu\textsuperscript{3}zu\textsuperscript{3}ma\textsuperscript{23} ru\textsuperscript{3}wa\textsuperscript{23} yu\textsuperscript{3}?p. nga\textsuperscript{3} ni\textsuperscript{3} ga\textsuperscript{3}?a\textsuperscript{34}h ngwi\textsuperscript{3}h-i\textsuperscript{3}. nga\textsuperscript{43} gu\textsuperscript{3}ci\textsuperscript{34}p ngwi\textsuperscript{3}h-i\textsuperscript{3} du\textsuperscript{3}\textsuperscript{3}wa\textsuperscript{3} yu\textsuperscript{3}?u\textsuperscript{4}hu\textsuperscript{3} ni\textsuperscript{3}k\textsuperscript{4}i\textsuperscript{34}p ngwi\textsuperscript{3}h-i\textsuperscript{3} ni\textsuperscript{3}ya\textsuperscript{34}h ngwi\textsuperscript{3}h-i\textsuperscript{3} ru\textsuperscript{3}wa\textsuperscript{23} yu\textsuperscript{3}?u\textsuperscript{4}hu\textsuperscript{3}. 6. nga\textsuperscript{3} ni\textsuperscript{3} gi\textsuperscript{3}r\textsuperscript{a}\textsuperscript{34}h ra\textsuperscript{4}ya\textsuperscript{34} ni\textsuperscript{3}p za\textsuperscript{3}na\textsuperscript{34} d\textsuperscript{4}h ni\textsuperscript{3}k\textsuperscript{4}a\textsuperscript{4}-a\textsuperscript{3} gi\textsuperscript{3}ni\textsuperscript{34}h ru\textsuperscript{3}wa\textsuperscript{23} yu\textsuperscript{3}?u\textsuperscript{4}hu\textsuperscript{3}. we\textsuperscript{2} d\textsuperscript{4} ni\textsuperscript{3} na\textsuperscript{3}ni\textsuperscript{3}k\textsuperscript{3}a\textsuperscript{4}h ngo\textsuperscript{4} ri\textsuperscript{3} na\textsuperscript{3}p\textsuperscript{34}ma\textsuperscript{3} du\textsuperscript{3}k\textsuperscript{4}w. 7. nga\textsuperscript{43} ni\textsuperscript{4} nga\textsuperscript{43} gu\textsuperscript{3}ci\textsuperscript{34}p zi\textsuperscript{3}gi\textsuperscript{c}a\textsuperscript{65}-a\textsuperscript{3} ni\textsuperscript{3} na\textsuperscript{3}ta\textsuperscript{34}-a\textsuperscript{3} gu\textsuperscript{3}ni\textsuperscript{3} yu\textsuperscript{3}?p zi\textsuperscript{3}zi\textsuperscript{4} ni\textsuperscript{3}ta\textsuperscript{3}h ni\textsuperscript{3}k\textsuperscript{4}a\textsuperscript{4}-a\textsuperscript{3} ne\textsuperscript{3} ga\textsuperscript{3}p.

LITERAL TRANSLATION

1. Formerly suffered a man poor that trouble caused wife-his. 2. Because that was sweetheart-of woman that. And counselled together the-two-she. And then had-she husband-her went-she mouth-of pit earthquake. “Let’s-go see-we how is pit earthquake. 4. Because that much desire-I see-I how is-it” says woman that heard husband-her. 5. And then believed he and then went the-two-she. When arrived the-two-she mouth-of pit stood the-two-she looked the-two-she inside pit. 6. And then pushed hand woman that husband-her fell in pit. So thus and returned alone she went-back house-his. 7. And then when arrived sweetheart-her, and notified-she heard him that no husband-her lived any-

FREE TRANSLATION

Once upon a time there was an unfortunate man whose wife caused him lots of trouble. It all came about because she had a sweetheart. The two of them plotted together against her husband. Then she took her husband to the pit. “Let’s see what the pit is like. I’d like very much to see it” said that woman to her husband. And he believed her. So the two of them went off together. When they arrived at the mouth of the pit, the two of them stood there, looking down into it. Then the woman pushed her husband and he fell down into the pit. Then the woman returned alone to his house. And when her sweetheart arrived she told him that her husband wasn’t alive anymore,
8. da'diŋ aŋ gą'ą'ą'h du'ni'ą'h-i3 ru'wa23 yu3u4'hu3 tą'ą'h-ą' na'ą'tą'ą'ŋ gu'ni'i yu2p. 9. ni'ą'ta'h zi3 ga'wa3 zi3 ga'ne3 ngwe2p. da'diə'zi3 aŋ ga'wa3ŋ ni3ka3h ta3h ni3p dą'ą'h. 10. we2 da3 ni3 ga'ne3 ą'ą na'ą'ngwa3ŋ ngwa3ni3. we2 dą3 ni3 ga'wa3ŋ ni3ka4'ą'ą' tą'ą'h-ą'. 11 za3ni4 nu3 ga'wa3ŋ yu2p wa3 ni3'na3pu3 yu3p nu3 yu3p ra3wa23 yu3u4'hu3. nga3 ni3 ą'ą'ka3 du3'ni3'ą'h tą'ą'ą'. 12 ni3 we2 da3 za33 zi3 na4pu4 dą'ą'h. ni4 gi3zi3h ą'ą'h y03p3 gi'ną3'ą'h ru3wa23 yu3u4'hu3. u'ta3 na'ka3 w.e2 a'wa3. ni3'zi3-gą3'ą'ą'ḥ żų'tu43 ni3p. 13 nga3 ni4 gą3ą'ą'ą'żų'kwa3'ą'ń du3'wa3ŋ ga'wa3 žų'ru3wa23 yu3u4'hu3. 14. we2 dą3 ni3 u'ta3 gu3'ą'ą'ą'ń gu3'wa3ŋ ni3'na4pu4 dą'ą'h nga4 gi3ni3pi3 żų'kwa12. nga3 ni4 gą3'mi3'ą'ń żų'kwa21 dą'ą'h, ų'nu4 w.i3 zi3 pỳa21 re3p nu4 re3p ni3'ya3h ta3'ą'h żų3 gu'ni3 zi3 na4pu4 dą'ą'h.

more. 8. Because already went throw-she in pit said-she notified-she heard him. 9. “Nothing that will happen if live (together) the-two-us. Because that already died husband-my’ said woman that. 10. So thus and lived (together) truly the-two-her. So thus and died husband-her said-she. 11. But not died he was living he was-in he inside pit. And then crows lowered mazorcas, elotes also, eggs also, in pit. 12. And so thus ate man that. And completed seven years was-in-he inside pit. Much grew hair head-his. And clothing-his torn completely. 13. And then went serpent lightning entered it inside pit. So then and very frightened man that when saw-he serpent. And then said serpent that ‘What is-it that doing you are-in you here’ said it heard because she had pushed him down into the pit. “Nothing will happen to us if we live together, because my husband is now dead” said that woman. So she and her sweetheart began to live together. Well then, she said that her husband had died. But he really wasn’t dead: he was alive down in the pit. The crows brought him ears of dried corn, roasting ears, and eggs. That way he had something to eat. For seven years he was in the pit. His hair grew very long, and his clothing was worn to shreds. Then the lightning serpent arrived on the scene and entered the cave. The man was very frightened on seeing the serpent. But the serpent said “What are you doing in here?” The man answered
15. we² da³ ni¹ ta⁴h zi³ na⁷p u⁴ da²h zi² ni⁵ka³h ga³na³ na³ p ga³n ni³h yu⁵h ru³wa²⁵ ya⁵ u'h nā³h 16. ta'h zi¹ na⁷p u² da³h gu³n i³ zu³kwa²¹ da¹h. nga⁴⁵ ni¹ zì³zi² ru³wa²³ p-ni³ gi³ri³h zo²⁹ ga³r a³ wi³ t-ra³⁴ du³ne²¹ nga⁴³ ni³ ga³wi⁴ p-ne³⁹ že⁵⁹ e yu³⁵ u'hu³. 17. nga⁴⁵ ni¹ na'gu'nà²² mà³p a²¹. nga³ ni¹ u'ta³ ga³yu³ to³⁴ ni¹ na'râ²⁹ zo³⁹. 18. ni³ gu³-du³we⁴ zo²⁹. ni¹ gi³ri³⁹ re³⁹ za³q'ha³. da³dî³⁹ u'ta³ du¹² œwe³. 19. da³dî³⁴ ni³' ta³h zi² mà⁵ ni³ya³h ta³⁴h żu³kwa¹² gu³nī³ zi³ na⁷p u⁴ da³h. 20. we³ da³² ni¹ na'râ²³h to³⁴ ngo³ n.a'²ši ga³n i³ yâ³h wa³h nā³q'³ du³kwa'h. 21. nga⁴⁵ ni¹ gi³ni³¹ i³ ni³ka³h. nga⁴³ ni¹ ga³ta³h yu³⁵ gu³nī³ sî³- gi³ca³⁵ yu³⁵, nu'h w.i³ za'h ni¹ ro³ wa²⁴ ni³ka³h wa²⁴ ngo³ zì³ na³ p mà³h 22. ta³h ni³p da³h gu³nī³ zì³gi³ca³⁴p-a³ ni³ki³⁹ ngwi³h-i³. we² da³² ni¹ gi³ni³⁴h du³²wi³. ni¹ ga³wi³⁹

man that. 15. So thus and said man that “Wife-my came to-put-in me inside pit this.” 16. Said man that heard serpent that. And then “If want you-and will-draw-out-I you grab you-end tail-my. And then will-go-out you-to outside pit. 17. And then will-shake-I myself. And then much will-fall feathers in and will-gather you. 18. And will-sell you. And will-make you money. Because very expensive. 19. Because there aren’t any here’ said serpent heard man that. 20. So thus and joined-together-he feathers a bed big (of them) embraced-he went returned-house-his. 21. And then saw wife-his. And then said she heard sweetheart her. “Why is-it that and like is husband-my is a man coming there,” 22. said woman that heard sweetheart-her stood the-two-her. So thus and fell lightning. And died the-two-

“My wife’s to blame. She got me into this pit.” Then the serpent said “If you want to get out, I’ll take you out. Hang on to the end of my tail, and you’ll get outside this pit. And then I’ll shake myself and lots of my feathers will come out. You gather them all together and sell them. You’ll make lots of money, because they’re very expensive. And there aren’t any around here.” That’s what the serpent said to the man. The man gathered up the feathers and joined them together. Hanging onto them, he arrived at his house. When his wife saw him coming she said to her sweetheart “Why does that man coming over there look like my husband?” Then, as the two of them were standing there a bolt of lightning fell and struck both of them dead. When
her. 23. So thus and when arrived man that heard-his. And lived the three children-his. 24. So thus and lived-he with the children-his and much sold-he feathers-of serpent lightning. 25. And much made-he money, became-he rich.

the man arrived at his house he found his three children still living. So he lived with his children. He sold lots of the feathers of the lightning serpent. He made lots of money and became rich.