

## THE PLUMED SERPENT RESCUES A MAN

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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  $du^3kwa^2 du^3wi^3$  'houses of the lightning.' The term  $du^3wi^3$  '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  $žu^3kwa^{21} du^3wi^3$  '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.

## TEXT

1. nga<sup>43</sup> na<sup>2</sup> gi<sup>3</sup>ra<sup>34?</sup> ngo<sup>4</sup> zi<sup>3</sup> na<sup>3</sup>u<sup>4</sup> ni<sup>4</sup>ki<sup>3</sup> da<sup>3</sup>h za<sup>3</sup>yu<sup>43</sup>  
 gi<sup>3</sup>ya<sup>3</sup>h ni<sup>3</sup>ka<sup>43</sup>h. 2. da<sup>3</sup>di<sup>43?</sup> zi<sup>3</sup> wa<sup>34</sup> zi<sup>3</sup>gi<sup>4</sup>ca<sup>45?</sup> ni<sup>2?</sup> da<sup>3</sup>h.  
 ni<sup>3</sup> da<sup>3</sup>ga<sup>3?</sup>mi<sup>34</sup> du<sup>3</sup>gwi<sup>34?</sup> ngwi<sup>5</sup>h-i<sup>3</sup>. 3. nga<sup>43</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> ni<sup>3</sup>ka<sup>34</sup>h-a<sup>3</sup>  
 ni<sup>3</sup>ka<sup>4</sup>-a<sup>3</sup> ga<sup>3?</sup>a<sup>34</sup>h-a<sup>3</sup> du<sup>3</sup>wa<sup>3</sup> yu<sup>3</sup>u<sup>4</sup>h yu<sup>12</sup>. ga<sup>4?</sup>a<sup>4</sup>h ni<sup>4?</sup>yo<sup>4?</sup>  
 da<sup>3</sup>h wa<sup>34</sup> yu<sup>3</sup>u<sup>4</sup>h yu<sup>12</sup>. 4. da<sup>3</sup>di<sup>34?</sup> zi<sup>3</sup> u<sup>2</sup>ta<sup>3</sup> ru<sup>3</sup>wa<sup>2</sup>h  
 gi<sup>3</sup>ni<sup>3?</sup>i<sup>21</sup> da<sup>3</sup>h wa<sup>3</sup>h ta<sup>34</sup>h ni<sup>2?</sup> da<sup>3</sup>h gu<sup>3</sup>ni<sup>3</sup> ni<sup>3</sup>ka<sup>4</sup>-a<sup>3</sup>.  
 5. nga<sup>43</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> gu<sup>3</sup>zu<sup>3</sup>ma<sup>23</sup> ru<sup>3</sup>wa<sup>23</sup> yu<sup>2?</sup>. nga<sup>3</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> ga<sup>3?</sup>a<sup>34</sup>h  
 ngwi<sup>5</sup>h-i<sup>5</sup>. nga<sup>43</sup> gu<sup>3</sup>ci<sup>35?</sup> ngwi<sup>5</sup>h-i<sup>3</sup> du<sup>3</sup>wa<sup>3</sup> yu<sup>3</sup>u<sup>4</sup>hu<sup>3</sup>  
 ni<sup>3</sup>ki<sup>35?</sup> ngwi<sup>5</sup>h-i<sup>3</sup> ni<sup>3</sup>ya<sup>34</sup>h ngwi<sup>5</sup>h-i<sup>3</sup> ru<sup>3</sup>wa<sup>23</sup> yu<sup>3</sup>u<sup>4</sup>hu<sup>3</sup>.  
 6. nga<sup>3</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> gi<sup>3</sup>ra<sup>2</sup>h ra<sup>3?</sup>a<sup>3</sup> ni<sup>3?</sup> za<sup>4</sup>na<sup>43</sup> da<sup>3</sup>h ni<sup>3</sup>ka<sup>4</sup>-a<sup>3</sup>  
 gi<sup>3</sup>ni<sup>34</sup>h ru<sup>3</sup>wa<sup>23</sup> yu<sup>3</sup>u<sup>4</sup>hu<sup>3</sup>. we<sup>2</sup> da<sup>3</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> na<sup>3</sup>ni<sup>3</sup>ka<sup>34</sup>h ngo<sup>4</sup>  
 ri<sup>3</sup> na<sup>3?</sup>a<sup>34</sup>h du<sup>3</sup>kwa<sup>3</sup>. 7. nga<sup>43</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> nga<sup>43</sup> gu<sup>3</sup>ci<sup>35?</sup> zi<sup>3</sup>gi<sup>4</sup>ca<sup>45?</sup>-a<sup>3</sup>  
 ni<sup>3</sup> na<sup>3</sup>ta<sup>35?</sup>-a<sup>3</sup> gu<sup>3</sup>ni<sup>3</sup> yu<sup>2?</sup> zi<sup>3</sup>zi<sup>4</sup> ni<sup>3</sup>ta<sup>4</sup>h ni<sup>3</sup>ka<sup>4</sup>-a<sup>3</sup> ne<sup>3</sup> ga<sup>5?</sup>.

## 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<sup>3</sup>dj<sup>4?</sup> a<sup>5?</sup> ga<sup>3?</sup>a<sup>34</sup>h du<sup>3</sup>ni<sup>34</sup>h-i<sup>3</sup> ru<sup>3</sup>wa<sup>23</sup> yu<sup>3?</sup>u<sup>4</sup>hu<sup>3</sup> ta<sup>34</sup>h-a<sup>3</sup>  
na<sup>3</sup>ta<sup>35?</sup>-a<sup>3</sup> gu<sup>3</sup>ni<sup>3</sup> yu<sup>2?</sup>. 9. ni<sup>3</sup>ta<sup>4</sup>h zi<sup>3</sup> ga<sup>4</sup>wi<sup>3</sup> zi<sup>3</sup> ga<sup>4</sup>ne<sup>3</sup>  
ngwe<sup>?</sup>. da<sup>3</sup>dj<sup>34</sup> zi<sup>3</sup> a<sup>5?</sup> ga<sup>3</sup>wi<sup>35?</sup> ni<sup>3</sup>ka<sup>5</sup>h ta<sup>3</sup>h ni<sup>2?</sup> da<sup>3</sup>h.  
10. we<sup>2</sup> da<sup>3</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> ga<sup>3</sup>ne<sup>3</sup> ža<sup>5</sup>nga<sup>5?</sup> ngwi<sup>5</sup>h-i<sup>3</sup>. we<sup>2</sup> da<sup>3</sup> ni<sup>4</sup>  
ga<sup>3</sup>wi<sup>35?</sup> ni<sup>3</sup>ka<sup>4</sup>-a<sup>3</sup> ta<sup>34</sup>h-a<sup>3</sup>. 11. za<sup>3</sup>ni<sup>4</sup> nu<sup>3</sup> ga<sup>3</sup>wi<sup>35?</sup> yu<sup>2?</sup>  
wa<sup>34</sup> ni<sup>5?</sup>na<sup>5?</sup> yu<sup>2?</sup> nu<sup>4</sup> yu<sup>2?</sup> ra<sup>3</sup>wa<sup>23</sup> yu<sup>3?</sup>u<sup>4</sup>hu<sup>3</sup>. nga<sup>43</sup> ni<sup>4</sup>  
ža<sup>3</sup>ka<sup>43</sup> du<sup>3</sup>ni<sup>34</sup>h ta<sup>3?</sup>a<sup>3</sup>, ci<sup>34</sup> ne<sup>3</sup>h, ču<sup>3</sup>h ne<sup>3</sup>h, ru<sup>3</sup>wa<sup>23</sup>  
yu<sup>3?</sup>u<sup>4</sup>hu<sup>3</sup>. 12. ni<sup>4</sup> we<sup>2</sup> da<sup>3</sup> ža<sup>23</sup> zi<sup>3</sup> na<sup>3?</sup>u<sup>4</sup> da<sup>3</sup>h. ni<sup>4</sup> gi<sup>3</sup>zi<sup>2</sup>h  
či<sup>3</sup>h yo<sup>3?</sup>o<sup>3</sup> gi<sup>3</sup>nu<sup>43</sup>h ru<sup>3</sup>wa<sup>23</sup> yu<sup>3?</sup>u<sup>4</sup>hu<sup>3</sup>. u<sup>2</sup>ta<sup>3</sup> na<sup>3</sup>ka<sup>3</sup> w.e<sup>2</sup>  
a<sup>3</sup>wi<sup>3</sup>. ni<sup>4</sup> zi<sup>3</sup>-ga<sup>3?</sup>a<sup>34</sup>h žu<sup>3</sup>tu<sup>45</sup> ni<sup>5?</sup>. 13. nga<sup>43</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> ga<sup>3?</sup>a<sup>34</sup>h  
žu<sup>3</sup>kwa<sup>21</sup> du<sup>3?</sup>wi<sup>3</sup> ga<sup>3</sup>tu<sup>3</sup>h žu ru<sup>3</sup>wa<sup>23</sup> yu<sup>3?</sup>u<sup>4</sup>hu<sup>3</sup>. 14. we<sup>2</sup>  
da<sup>3</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> u<sup>2</sup>ta<sup>3</sup> gu<sup>3</sup>žu<sup>3?</sup>wi<sup>35?</sup> zi<sup>3</sup> na<sup>3?</sup>u<sup>4</sup> da<sup>3</sup>h nga<sup>43</sup> gi<sup>3</sup>ni<sup>3?</sup>i<sup>3</sup>  
žu<sup>3</sup>kwa<sup>12</sup>. nga<sup>43</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> ga<sup>3?</sup>mi<sup>34</sup> žu<sup>3</sup>kwa<sup>21</sup> da<sup>3</sup>h, nu<sup>4</sup>h w.i<sup>3</sup> zi<sup>3</sup>  
?ya<sup>21</sup> re<sup>4?</sup> nu<sup>4</sup> re<sup>5?</sup> ni<sup>3</sup>ya<sup>3</sup>h ta<sup>34</sup>h žu<sup>3</sup> gu<sup>3</sup>ni<sup>3</sup> zi<sup>3</sup> na<sup>3?</sup>u<sup>4</sup> da<sup>3</sup>h.

more. 8. Because already went threw-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. 14. 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. we<sup>2</sup> da<sup>3</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> ta<sup>34h</sup> zi<sup>3</sup> na<sup>3u</sup> da<sup>3h</sup> zi<sup>3</sup> ni<sup>3ka</sup>h ga<sup>3na</sup>na<sup>35p</sup>  
ga<sup>5ni</sup>h yu<sup>5h</sup> ru<sup>3wa</sup> yu<sup>3u</sup>h na<sup>3h</sup> 16. ta<sup>3h</sup> zi<sup>3</sup> na<sup>3u</sup>  
da<sup>3h</sup> gu<sup>3ni</sup> žu<sup>3kwa</sup> da<sup>3h</sup>. nga<sup>43</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> zi<sup>3zi</sup> ru<sup>3wa</sup> ?-ni<sup>4</sup>  
gi<sup>5ri</sup>h zo<sup>5p</sup> ga<sup>5ra</sup>wi<sup>5</sup> t-ra<sup>34</sup> du<sup>3ne</sup> nga<sup>43</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> ga<sup>4wi</sup>  
?-ne<sup>34p</sup> že<sup>5p</sup>e yu<sup>3u</sup>hu<sup>3</sup>. 17. nga<sup>43</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> na<sup>4gu</sup>na<sup>21</sup> ma<sup>3p</sup>a<sup>21</sup>.  
nga<sup>3</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> u<sup>2ta</sup> ga<sup>4yu</sup> to<sup>343</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> na<sup>4ra</sup>? zo<sup>5p</sup>. 18. ni<sup>4</sup> gu<sup>4</sup>-  
du<sup>4we</sup> zo<sup>5p</sup>. ni<sup>4</sup> gi<sup>4ri</sup> re<sup>5p</sup> za<sup>4ha</sup>. da<sup>3di</sup> u<sup>2ta</sup> du<sup>4</sup>-  
?we<sup>3</sup>. 19. da<sup>3di</sup> ni<sup>3ta</sup>h zi<sup>3</sup> ma<sup>5</sup> ni<sup>3ya</sup>h ta<sup>3h</sup> žu<sup>3kwa</sup>  
gu<sup>3ni</sup> zi<sup>3</sup> na<sup>3u</sup> da<sup>3h</sup>. 20. we<sup>3</sup> da<sup>3</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> na<sup>3ra</sup>?a<sup>3h</sup> to<sup>34</sup>  
ngo<sup>4</sup> n.a<sup>3</sup> ši ga<sup>3ni</sup> ?ya<sup>3h</sup> wa<sup>3h</sup> na<sup>3pa</sup> du<sup>3kwa</sup>h. 21. nga<sup>43</sup>  
ni<sup>4</sup> gi<sup>3ni</sup> ni<sup>3ka</sup>h. nga<sup>43</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> ga<sup>3ta</sup>h yu<sup>2p</sup> gu<sup>3ni</sup> si<sup>3</sup>-  
gi<sup>3ca</sup> yu<sup>2p</sup>, nu<sup>4h</sup> w.i<sup>3</sup> za<sup>3h</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> ro<sup>3p</sup> wa<sup>34</sup> ni<sup>3ka</sup>h wa<sup>34</sup>  
ngo<sup>4</sup> zi<sup>3</sup> ?na<sup>35p</sup> ma<sup>3h</sup> 22. ta<sup>34h</sup> ni<sup>2p</sup> da<sup>3h</sup> gu<sup>3ni</sup> zi<sup>3gi</sup>ča<sup>45p</sup>-a<sup>3</sup>  
ni<sup>3ki</sup> ngwi<sup>3h</sup>-i<sup>3</sup>. we<sup>2</sup> da<sup>4</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> gi<sup>3ni</sup> du<sup>3wi</sup>. ni<sup>4</sup> ga<sup>3wi</sup>?

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-he 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

ngwi<sup>h</sup>-i<sup>3</sup>. 23. we<sup>2</sup> da<sup>3</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> nga<sup>43</sup> nu<sup>3</sup>kwi<sup>35?</sup> zi<sup>3</sup> na<sup>3?</sup>u<sup>4</sup> da<sup>3</sup>h  
 du<sup>3</sup>kwa<sup>3</sup>h ni<sup>4</sup> n.e<sup>3</sup> ne<sup>3</sup>h wa<sup>5?</sup>nī<sup>5</sup>h da<sup>3?</sup>ni<sup>3</sup>. 24. we<sup>2</sup> da<sup>3</sup> ni<sup>4</sup>  
 ga<sup>3</sup>ne<sup>3</sup> nga<sup>4</sup> ne<sup>3</sup>h da<sup>3?</sup>ni<sup>3</sup>. ni<sup>3</sup> u<sup>2</sup>ta<sup>3</sup> gu<sup>3</sup>du<sup>3?</sup>we<sup>3</sup> si<sup>3</sup>-to<sup>34</sup>  
 žu<sup>3</sup>kwa<sup>21</sup> du<sup>3?</sup>wi<sup>3</sup>. 25. ni<sup>4</sup> u<sup>2</sup>ta<sup>3</sup> gi<sup>3</sup>ri<sup>3?</sup>i<sup>3</sup>h ža<sup>3?</sup>a<sup>4</sup>ha<sup>3</sup> ga<sup>3</sup>wi<sup>3</sup>  
 ži<sup>3</sup>ru<sup>3?</sup>we<sup>43</sup>.

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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.

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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.