

Three Tlapaneco Stories*

FROM TLACOAPA, GUERRERO

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THE DELUGE†

[FIRST ACCOUNT]

A *buzzard* came to talk with a man that was working in the mountains and said to him: "Don't work any more for now the world is going to come to an end."

The *buzzard* then said to a tree: "Arise," and to a rock: "Arise." The tree arose but the rock did not.

Then the *buzzard* said to the man: "Make yourself a box and tell nobody, not even your family, for they will cry and therefore it is better that you tell them nothing."

When the man finished making the box the *buzzard* put the man

[SECOND ACCOUNT]

A man was working daily and behind him were raised up every sort of vegetation and tree. He knew that everything was being raised up behind him every day.‡

Then a *man* advised him: "Don't work any more because the world is going to end soon. Only make yourself a box to cover yourself with but tell nobody and when you finish I'll return to shut you in it. Don't even tell your family."

When the box was finished the *man* returned and enclosed the man

* The dictation was given in a mixture of Tlapaneco and Spanish unsuitable for linguistic analysis. This document is a free translation.

† This account was related by one informant, Eduardo Ignacio, and then asked for from another, Catarino Ignacio, both Tlapanecos of Tlacoapa, Gro., who related it somewhat differently. Each account is given in full with the major differences in each italicized. The first informant was in his twenties, the second in his thirties.

‡ This item occurs twice in the first account but only once in this. The cause here is not indicated.

[FIRST ACCOUNT]

inside and shut up the box with a dog and a chicken also inside. Soon the man saw through a crack in the box that it was raining and he also heard the animals that live in the water were bothering his box, desiring, as it seemed, to eat the man. He also saw that the world was full of water. Later he saw that the land was very swampy, so much so that it was not possible to walk. Then he drew his head into the box again. Later he left his box when he saw that the shrubs were growing and he went to work the ground.

The *chicken* changed herself into a *buzzard* and flew over the land. Wherever the *buzzard* flew there sprang up behind him mountains and valleys. [Note the inconsistency in the sex.]

Each day the man went to work, and each afternoon when he returned from his work he saw there were tortillas for his meal but he did not know who had prepared them.

Then the man went to the mountain-top and there seated himself each day to see who came to make his tortillas, but the dog stayed in the house each day. Finally he saw that the dog was removing her skin so he promptly entered the house. When he arrived he saw that a woman was grinding corn. Next he saw that the skin of the dog was piled up on the bed. Then the man took the dog's skin and put it in

[SECOND ACCOUNT]

in it with a *black* chicken and also a *black* dog. That very night there was a great shaking of the earth, but the box was four fingers thick.

First the man saw that the world was full of water and when the water went down he saw nothing but mud.

Then the first and second days the man went to work but the dog remained behind. When the man returned home each night the dog was wagging his tail and the man saw that there were tortillas ready for him.

The third day the man went off as always but he didn't go too far away, only far enough to be hid and yet be able to see who it was that was visiting his house to make tortillas. He saw nobody come but only that the dog was changing her skin. Then he returned in order to see better.

When he arrived he saw that a girl was there with a *hupil* that reached to her knees. Then he hid the skin of the dog in the coals of the

[FIRST ACCOUNT]

the flame to burn it but the woman said: "Don't burn my clothing for if the skin is burned up our children will not grow." Thus the woman remained without taking her proper skin again.

[SECOND ACCOUNT]

fire and thus it was burnt. But the girl said: "Oh, why do you burn that? Now not many children will be born to us." *

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THE RAIN-GOD AND THE FIRE†

Long, long ago, 'Ahku [the rain-god] had two daughters. One day *Mbahtsu'*, the fire, went to visit him. There he fell in love with one of the daughters and married her.

The father-in-law then asked the fire to go out and prepare a nice piece of *tlacolole*. After considering the matter, the fire said one day to the father-in-law: "I have a piece of *tlacolole* and have decided to go and burn it today." The fire was referring to a fallen tree he had seen.

But the rain-god thought his son-in-law was lazy and that he was only fooling about having a piece of *tlacolole*, so he scornfully remarked: "It's not true. Where does my son-in-law have any piece of *tlacolole*?"

When the fire left the house, however, the rain-god asked him to burn a piece of tlacolole for him also.

When the fire had ignited the dead tree, his own piece of tlacolole burned very well, but he left his father-in-law's piece only poorly burned so that it looked as though it had only been nibbled at. He left it this way deliberately.

Upon returning, the rain-god made fun of the fire's work and said that the job was not well done. "Why! Why didn't you burn it more completely?" he asked.

* See "Yuman Tribes of the Gila River," page 7, and also "Indians of South America" (Radin), page 159, for similarities to this Tlapaneco account. Cf. also "Cosmogonia huichol" in this issue.

† This account is a combination of the story as given in 1946 by two different Tlapaneco informants, Catarino Ignacio, about 30, and his father, Victoriano Ignacio of Tlacoapa, Gro. The two agreed except in the italicized portions, which were by the father.

"Why? Didn't I do a good job? What do you want? What more can I do?" replied the fire.

But the rain-god answered him: "I want my piece of tlacolole well burnt, very well burnt."

"Well," said the fire, "I am going out now to finish the job." And as he left he advised the rain-god to take good care of the house while he was gone and to be careful that nothing caught on fire.

"When are you going to burn the piece of *tlacolole*?" asked the father-in-law.

"About noon," answered the fire.

About noon the rain-god heard the fire crackling as it spread and raced up the mountain-side towards the house, and when he realized that it was approaching closer and closer he ran off and hid in the middle of a big swamp near a deep gully where he was surrounded by water.

But the fire made fun of him because he ran off so scared.

Then the fire asked his wife to ask her father for some seeds to plant in his milpa. *But the rain-god said: "I'm going to give him only what is no good. So the rain-god gave his son-in-law only the shells of the seeds, the empty hulls that the weevils and mice had left. He gave him only what he thought wouldn't grow."*

The fire went off and planted what had been given him. *The rain-god was surprised to see that everything that the fire planted sprouted beautifully, which made him very jealous so that he tried to poke fun because he was so angry. When the fire planted, however, no rain fell and the milpa withered and burned.*

The rain-god planted a milpa with good seeds. But nothing grew except here and there a sickly-looking plant, despite the good rains.

Then the rain-god gathered together all the birds and ordered them to rob the fire's milpa of the plants that looked nice and to replant them in his own milpa. He ordered the ravens and the bluejays and the parrots and all. Then they robbed the fire's milpa and planted the plants in the milpa of the rain-god.

Seeing all of this, the fire decided to part company with his father-in-law and so he ran off and hid in a hole of a tree. He thought that perhaps this would cause the rain-god to repent of his evil when he became hungry.

Before leaving his house, the fire gave his wife one of his sandals to use for a comal. He gave the sandal the power to cook tortillas and

food for his wife but not for her father. Then he went off and hid in a tree.

Each afternoon the rain-god waited for his son-in-law, and likewise each morning. He went to the house of his daughter and inquired about him but she only replied that he had gone off, she knew not where, because he was very sad over the condition of his milpas. She said he would not return unless someone repaired his milpas for him.

Then the rain-god could not answer for he was very much ashamed, realizing that he was to blame. He began to wonder how his daughter prepared her meals and asked her several times: "Has your husband not yet returned?"

Each time she replied as before: "He will not return until his milpas are fixed once more."

Then again he asked her how she prepared her food and she replied: "He left me one of his sandals to use." But the rain-god further inquired: "How can a sandal cook one's meals?" But she only answered: "I don't know."

At this the rain-god went to look for the fire, for there was nobody to prepare his meals and he was hungry, very hungry. But the fire could not be found.*

Finally the rain-god had so much hunger that he decided he had better replant the milpas of the fire to see if that would induce him to return as his daughter had said.

So again the rain-god gathered together all of the birds and ordered them to return all of the little plants to their former places in the milpas of the fire, which they did.

After this, the fire decided to give the rain-god a sign of his whereabouts, so he smoked the wings of the woodpecker that had its nest in the tree where the fire was hiding.

When the rain-god saw the smoke on the wings of this bird he asked: "Where is the man that makes smoke? He is hiding and I am looking for him." So the woodpecker led the rain-god to the tree where the fire was hiding and asked the fire to return. But the fire didn't want to come because of the way he had been treated. At last, though, he agreed on the condition that two large piles of fire-wood be heaped up in one place on a plane. He promised to return about noon.

* Here the informant explained that the fire was not a man but simply the fire, only that in this story the fire talks like a man. He must, however, be considered a male because the three stones around the hearth-fire are considered his wife.

This they did; and about noon, just as he had promised, the fire arrived and burned the wood with a great smoke.

The rain-god then, since he was very hungry, placed his food on the coals. He tried to cut his squash with a machete but it was hard, so hard that he had to go and get his ax. But because he was so very extremely hungry the rain-god pulled his food out of the coals before it was fully cooked, and so he became sick and vomited.

Thus the rain-god and the fire were friends once more and there were good rains over all of the milpas of both the rain-god and the fire.

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THE MAN THAT EXCHANGED PLACES WITH A BUZZARD

One day long ago a man talked with a buzzard and said to him: "You fly very well. You know nothing of hardships. You are always happy. You soar and glide gracefully, beautifully."

The buzzard replied: "So you think my flying is beautiful; do you? In what way is my flying beautiful? It is very unpleasant. I am sad all the day long. At the foul places of the road I have to hunt for food, food that smells bad and is rotten. You men are much better off than buzzards. The only trouble with you is that you are lazy, too lazy in fact to hunt for your food. And you even have hands and feet to work with. You can look for anything you care to eat but you are downright lazy. How would you like to change places with me?"

The man answered hesitatingly: "Why! How can we change places?"

"We can change right here and now," said the buzzard, "if you care to change, but what will your wife think? How will I explain matters to her?"

"You will have no explaining to do whatsoever," answered the man. "She will understand things perfectly. You just tell her that you are going to do the work that I have been doing."

So the buzzard and the man changed places with each other. The man donned the feathers and wings of the buzzard and the buzzard dressed in the clothes of the man. Thus they parted. The buzzard went to the home of the man and the man flew away into the air.

When the buzzard arrived at the door of the house, the wife came out with her nose in the air and said: "You smell like a buzzard." But

the answer came back: "If I smell like that, perhaps it is because a passing bird has defecated on me."

Then the buzzard began to work in the man's place. Each morning he went to hoe in the cornfield. Each day he repaired something around the house.

Then one day the woman noticed the difference in the work being done and remarked: "My, but you are working fine! I've never seen you work so hard! It makes me happy to see you work without having to be urged and scolded to do it!" Thus things went on for a whole year. And then, with the money that had been earned and saved the buzzard bought a cow, so they say. Finally, at the end of five years there were born five little calves.

Then when the five years were finished the man saw the buzzard in the yard of the house and said to him: "I would like to change places with you again and return your wings and feathers." But the buzzard did not want to change places again so he answered the man: "I have worked hard all these five years, harder than you ever worked. I have acquired cows and the food that I have longed for all my life."

But the man contested: "I am very sad and lonely. I have no place to sleep except on a rock or in some tall tree."

"Well," answered the buzzard, "since you are so very sad and lonely, I shall be willing to change with you again. But I have one request to ask of you. When you kill a cow to eat, will you not be kind enough to give me a leg so that I'll not have to eat bad food?"

"That's fine," agreed the man, "I'll give you a leg of each cow I kill, but how shall I know where to find you?"

"Oh, that's easy," responded the buzzard. "I'll sit on a rock near the house where you'll be able to see me. Only be sure to give me a leg for I've worked hard to acquire those cows."

And so, it is said that the man and buzzard changed places with each other once more and parted from each other again. The man returned to his home and his wife as before. When he killed a cow and had removed the skin a buzzard circled overhead and the man was reminded of his promise to the buzzard. Therefore he went to a nearby tree and there hung up a leg of the cow for the buzzard.

He had no sooner done this than his wife began to chide and scold him for such waste. "The buzzard never helped us out, why should we waste such good meat on the buzzard?" she said.

But the man simply answered: "I am going to give the meat to the buzzard because the poor bird never has anything good to eat."

NOTES

[N.44 III:1] THE TECHIALOYAN CODICES: CODICE P (CODEX FROM THE VICINITY OF TEPOTZOTLAN, MEX.).

This codex ("Fragment of a Village Book") proceeds from near Tepotzotlan, Estado de México, and may possibly form part of Codex T of our group, which is definitely from Tepotzotlan Tzontecomatl.¹

Codex P seems first to have been mentioned by Seler. It is preserved in the Ayer Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago,² and I am obliged to Dr. Pargellis of that Library for the microfilm copy which I have used to catalogue the manuscript.

Various of the places mentioned in Codex P exist near Tepotzotlan. For example, Tezcacoac seems to be the barrio of Texcacoa.³ Other places clearly localizable in the vicinity of Tepotzotlan and mentioned in Codex P are Acxotlan (another barrio, now Axotlan), *yxtlahuacan tepotzotecatl*, "Plain of the Tepotzotecos" and Coyotepec, San Cristobal (from which we also have a codex, V of the series). The remaining place-names include Apaxtlan (?), la Concepción (Coxepxiotzin), San Anto[nio], San Martín, San Mateo, Calpilco, San Miguel Santa Cruz (Xata clox—nothing to do with Christmas, however), Santa Cruz Yeçotitlan, Santa María and Texopan.

Codex P seems in truth to be a fragment: it has neither explanatory text nor the customary village personages with their names. It consists of 20 pp. (10 leaves), and measures 26.7 cms. according to the catalogue. (Width is not stated, but photographs show it to be about 25 cms. wide.) Codex T (the Tepotzotlan) contains ample text, and named personages, contains nine leaves and measures 28 x 25 cms.⁴

Judged from any point of view, the Tepotzotlan and present codices would fit together nicely. It remains to be seen just how closely they really are linked. —[R.H.B.]

¹ Codex T will be described in a future issue.

² Indian Linguistics Catalogue, Náhuatl No. 107.

³ This may also be the Tezcacoac forming a lindero between Xaltocan and Cuauhtitlan (Anales de Cuauhtitlan, Párr. 109).

⁴ Boban, 2:208,209. No. 81. Fragment d'histoire Chichimeque.