

The Sacrifice of Cocijo (Cosmological legend)

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Pitao, the incorporeal, the uncreated, the father of the gods

and the origin of everything that exists in the world, exhaling over Chaos created the heavens, the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, the seasons of the year, the days, the nights, the animals and plants, the rivers, oceans, and the mountains . . . The entire Universe came into being by a single exhale of his almighty breath . . .

Once the Universe had been created, he gathered together all the lesser gods and gave them dominion over the elements and created things, and he gave them power to rule and govern. And at the same time that he gave them their names that set them aside as superior arbitrators over creation and the elements, he gave them also the generic name, "Pitao" so that they might also be part of the holy essence of the supreme creator of every existing thing . . .

And he made Pitao Xoo the god of the earth and of earthquakes . . .

And to Pitao Cocijo the god of the water and rain . . .

And to Pitao Beé the god of the winds . . .

And to Pitao Cozaana the god of hunting and fishing . . .

And to Pitao Cocobi the god of seeds, the harvest and grains . . .

And to Pitao Pecala the god of dreams . . .

And to Pitao Peeci was given the responsibility of dream interpretation . . .

And to Pezelao he gave dominion of the night, and of the souls of the dead . . .

And to Benechaaba he made the spirit of corruption and darkness . . .

And thus was given to the gods the attributes which corresponded to their condition as arbitrators of the created things and elements . . . but to the smallest of the gods, who was later called Cocijo, he did not wish to give anything, since he considered him too small . . .

And after the symphony and harmony of the Cosmos had been organized and the elements had been bound up with the will of the gods, and order had been established on earth, he created humans in order to multiply and later become his people, the chosen people of Pitao . . . And this became the great Zapotec nation which grew and peopled the *Didjazáa* which stretched to every corner of the earth, even to the sea . . .

But Pitao, the incorporeal, the uncreated, the father of the gods and the origin of all that exists both on the earth and beyond the earth, did not create fire, that powerful component of the sky that awaited the person who could conquer it, because he wanted to test the spirit of sacrifice of the other gods and the industriousness of humanity.

And so it was that at night, when the rays of *Copichja* (the sun) did not warm the face of the earth, both people and beast swooned with cold, and the young ones died, and the birds had to hide in the most dense parts of vegetation so not to die, and the beasts in the deepest caverns of caves . . .

But the gods remained silent and waited, taking note of the hidden design of Pitao . . . And humanity suffered and cried, but did not find the way to make fire . . . Because the fire of the sky did not yet streak across the heavens, deafening men and beast and smiting the naked torsos of the mountains, mankind decided to make a gigantic mound, tall like a mountain, where their supplications would have easier access to the heavens and soften the heart of Pitao . . .

Day after day, during many suns and during many moons, the building of the mound never stopped and men came from every corner of the world inhabited by the chosen people of Pitao, to pile up rocks and earth, stone and earth, like the patient labor of ants, until the mound had become high indeed, even as high as a mountain . . .

Having finished the gigantic mound, they arraigned at its summit an extensive open space, and on top of it they erected a great pyramid dedicated to Pitao . . . And they returned to the bottom and waited . . .

Then Pitao, hardly satisfied by the scarce industry of men, but moved by their profound devotion, decided to create the one element that was still missing in order to test the sacrificial spirit of the gods, giving power and supreme dominion to the one which, without hesitation, passed the test of fire . . .

While the people waited at the bottom of the mound, on top of the mound all of the gods were gathered, and in front of them Pitao stacked up an enormous pile of wood and began to rub together the dry sticks, and he rubbed and rubbed and continued rubbing until the element, unknown to both gods and men, the powerful attribute of the sky, fire, sprang forth. And the fire engulfed the enormous pyre . . . And after a time the pyre became an enormous furnace which lapped the sky with tongues of flame and scattered the darkness of the night and spilled over to the earth the precious gift of heat . . .

After this, Pitao, the incorporeal, the uncreated, the infinite, the father of the gods and origin of everything that exists on earth, turned to the gods and said, "My children, now is the test."

The first to test the fire was Cociyo, the god of waters. But no sooner had he drawn near to the fire a few steps he shrank back, repelled by the heat and smoke let loose by the brazen furnace. . . Cocobi, the god of the harvest also tested the fire . . . so did Cozaana, the god of hunting and fishing . . . Each and every god tested the fire, and each and every god hesitated and shrank back, cowering from the power of that fiery crackling furnace.

Only the tiniest of the gods, the one who would later be known as Cocijo, had not yet tested the fire. Pitao did not want to even suggest that he try it, because he considered him too tiny. But the tiny god begged Pitao to let him try . . . and the other gods turned and looked at him . . . and Pitao said, "Test it"

Then the god, who was tiny, asked his older brother, Cociyo, to soak his garments in water, and he asked Beé to blow the wind in front of him to turn the flames away . . . and stepping back a bit he ran full speed to the bonfire and with one jump he threw himself headfirst into it . . . After the tiny god fell headfirst into the center of the bonfire whose flames angrily lapped the vastness, there began to appear a large dense and black cloud that rose from the pyre and rose and rose and rose until it stood fixed above the center of the earth . . . and later from the inside of that black cloud hanging over the mound leapt forth a flash of lightening whose brilliance blinded both gods and men and illuminated the ends of the earth and disappeared at the feet of Pitao with a horrific thunderclap which overcame the hearts of men and beasts, and shook the earth and vanished like a dreadful moan beyond the flanks and cliffs of the mountains.

And mankind, having overcome their fear, shouted out in a great voice of praise, "*De quietu guí . . . De quietu guí . . . Uhuila lo Pitao!*" (We have fire, we have fire, thanks be to Pitao!). and they immediately climbed up the steep sides of the mound and after bowing before the element born of the hands of supreme creator of every existing thing, they took control of fire which thenceforth ceased to be in the control of the gods . . .

And so it was that fire was born on earth and also the lightening from the sky that since then has streaked across the heavens and caught fire to the tree tops and smote the naked torsos of the mountains . . .

So Pitao gave the name "Cociyo" (lightening) to the tiniest of the gods, and in exchange for his sacrifice, he gave him supreme dominion over the other gods, because he passed without hesitation the test of fire.

And humankind named the great mound they had erected, "Diniguí" (hill of flame) in memory of the creation of fire, and "Danibán" (Sacred hill of the dead)¹ because they believed that is where the holy body of Cocijo lay buried. And afterwards they named the months of their calendar "Cocijo" so to never forget his merciful sacrifice.

¹ The hill "Monte-Alban" (Oaxaca, Oax.)