Aromatic copals

Culture

Copals in Mexico

The use of resin was a widespread practice in pre-Hispanic Mexico, as evidenced by the impressive offerings of copal discovered in the Sacred Cenote of Chichen Itza, an ancient Mayan city in Yucatan, and also in the lake of the Moon, in the Nevado de Toluca in the State of Mexico. Sculptures fashioned from the resin have also been found in the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan in Mexico City.

The qualities of the copal were widely recognized and used by the pre-Hispanic cultures for rituals, ceremonies, holidays, therapies, medicines and as a binding agent. Its cultural importance even survived the inquisition, and its use continues to this day among many indigenous peoples and mestizos. Its great importance is reflected in the fact that each language variant spoken in the country has a word for the resin in some of its forms: tree, resin or smoke, being copalli in Nahuatl and poom in the Mayan languages, which are the languages most representative of its wide distribution.

Ancient Mexicans considered the copal to be a protective god, and named it “Iztacteteo” meaning “white god” for the white smoke it produces when burned. In Aztec and Mayan offerings, copal was included in the form of small tortillas or tamales or grains of maize, therefore it is believed that copal was considered to be a food for the gods.

From the pre-Hispanic cultures, we have inherited ceremonial objects and rituals that form a part of our archaeological heritage.

URL: http://www.biodiversidad.gob.mx/v_ingles/use/copales/cultura_ingles.html

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