Amshetu Melo Forchu, Brindy Belinga Claude, "Entry on: Meusep Nforpeyam by Mama Asanatou", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1278. Entry version as of November 06, 2026.

Mama Asanatou

Meusep Nforpeyam

Cameroon

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions



We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Meusep Nforpeyam
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Bamun
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Cameroon
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	May 21, 2020
More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Yaoundé, Mfoundi, Central Cameroon
Genre	Folk tales, Myths
Target Audience	Crossover
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This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators



Mama Asanatou (Storyteller)

Age of Narrator: 77 (in 2020)

Social status: Housewife, matriarch

Profession: Housewife

Languages of narration: Bamun, Baba

Bio prepared by Amshetu Melo Forchu, University of Yaoundé, meloamshetu@gmail.com

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

Cultural Background*: Bamoun (Foumban)

The Bamoun Kingdom is situated in the Western region of Cameroon. It is surrounded by Donga Mantung and Bui Divisions in the North, Mifi Division in the West, Bafia and Bangante towns in the South and Banyo town in the East. Its origin dates back to 1390 with its founder Nchare, a prince from Rifum (the present day Bankim), in the Adamawa Region of Cameroon (see here, accessed: July 9, 2019). The Foumban traditional society is well structured with "Mfon" (King) at the head, closely assisted by the "Momamfon" the queen. Other custodians of culture include the notables. The Mfon is noted for his numerous wives and uncountable children. Other secret societies which assist in the administration of the Kingdom, both in the physical and spiritual realms, include the secret societies. Among them are: Nguri and Muitngu secret societies. Owing to the people attachments to the Gods, spirits and ancestors, the Foumban people pay particular attention the popular Nguon Festival (of fertility and protection), which has become a crowd pulling event in Cameroon for the past years. Gods and ancestors are worshiped during the festival and the spirit of sharing encouraged among the people by the king. The Foumban kingdom is one of the oldest Kingdom in Africa and noted for the invention of their own form of writing, which was later pushed to the periphery.

* Sources:

Mamadou, Ntiecheles, L*es conflicts Socio-politique dans le Royaume Bamoun de 1863–1889*, DIPESS II Dissertation, University of Yaoundé 1, 2000.

Fewoh, Paul Mouliom, *Collectives Décentralisée et Developpement Local: le Cas de la Commune Ubaine de Foumban*, DIPESS II Dissertation, University of Yaoundé, 2006.

Summary

Long time ago in a big village there lived a king called Nfordoboh, who had an only daughter and many people came from far and near

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for her hand in marriage. Nfordoboh gave two conditions. First, the person that would bring a big bundle of grass that would be used to roof his house would marry his daughter. He further added that this bundle of grass would not be like any other one; it has to produce a sound when thrown on the ground. The second condition was that the person should also climb the tallest palm tree in the village, and bring down one palm nut.

All the animals who were suitors for the daughter of Nfordoboh gathered and set out to fulfill these conditions. First, they all brought their bundle of grass; and all of them failed the first test, except for Meusep Nforpeyam*, who had actually buried a huge stone in the middle of his own bundle of grass, such that when thrown down on the bare floor; it produced a loud sound. Condition no. 2 — to climb the tallest palm tree and bring down a nut. Meusep Nforpeyam had gone down to the stream and had been fortunate to see a palm nut, which he collected and hid in his dress. Upon seeing the height of the palm tree; and imagining the task of harvesting a single nut; all the other animals desisted from the contest. Meusep Nforpeyam prepared himself for the task. Armed with a climbing rope and a song that he would sing while climbing he moved forward to the view of the entire village. Here is the song Meusep Nforpeyam sang on climbing**

“akwo meteum ndamo banga, kpong”

“mela para mohmibanga, kpong”

“foumbiiere shinda malong, kpong”

When he successfully climbed and “harvested***” the nut, on his way down he sang the following song****.

“osih meteum ndanmo banga, kpong”

“mela para mohmibanga, kponga, kpong”

“foumbiiere shinda malong, kpong”

When Meusep Nforpeyam climbed down, he was applauded by the entire people who had gathered to watch him, including all the animals who could not believe that he could do that. The thought that Meusep Nforpeyam would then marry the king’s daughter did not go down well with the other animals, who concluded that he was too small and unimportant to have such an honour. They conspired to

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position themselves in several road junctions where Meusep Nforpeyam was supposed to pass with his new wife to his own village, across the big river. To counter their conspiracy, Meusep Nforpeyam changed his name to Teta Mekepeuh***** and entered inside a calabash with his wife. The calabash began to roll with them through the roads where the other animals were standing guards. At each roadblock, the animals asked: "Who are you?" Meusep Nforpeyam replied: “My name is Teta Mekepeuh. I came here to see my father who was sick, and I am going back. I chose to come this time so that Meusep Nforpeyam, who is coming behind with his beautiful wife should not crush me, since I am too tiny.”

At the last roadblock Meusep Nforpeyam, now known as Teta Mekepeuh met a huge animal, who asked him: “Who are you and where are you going”? Again Teta Mekepeuh said: “My name is Teta Mekepeuh. I came here to see my father who was sick, and I am going back. I chose to come this time so that Meusep Nforpeyam, who is coming behind with his beautiful wife, should not crush me, since I am too tiny”. After narrating this story, the big animal was very sympathetic for him, and offered to help him cross the big river. Since this big animal himself couldn’t swim across the big river, he rather carried him and threw on the other side of the river. When Teta Mekepeuh (in a calabash) fell on the other side, it broke and he and his wife emerged from the calabash to an applause by his own people. When all the other animals heard and saw from across the river, they were very disappointed with themselves. They picked up quarrels, each accusing the other for failing to do one thing or the other.

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* This literally means a small animal which is more sensible than all others, in the local language of Bamun.

** Roughly the song can be translated as follows: “If I climb this tree successfully, I will marry the daughter of the king, and the king will build a beautiful house for me, full of treasure”.

*** In fact, it was not really harvested, because he climbed with it.

**** Roughly the song can be translated as follows: “If I climb down this and marry the daughter of the king, what he will do for me is yet to be imagined”.

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***** Teta Mekepeuh is actually a name for a particular type of calabash, in the local Bamoun language.

Analysis

Marrying a king's daughter has generally been highly challenging for the suitors. The suitors had to prove their worth by performing difficult tasks which needed wisdom, strength, or trickery to be completed. This is the case with the above myth from Cameroon. Only Meusep Nforpeyam, who made use of a great deal of wisdom, was able to have the king's daughter as wife.

The myth equally presents the important place animals have in Cameroon's tradition. They were and are still in some cases viewed as totems in some tribes and in others as symbols of life, wisdom, fertility etc. Though in recent years this mingling between humans and animals has reduced or has become more or less hidden, in time past, it was a normal phenomenon. That is why in the above myth we can see the animals equally presenting themselves with the hope of having the princess as wife.

Finally, an important aspect raised by this myth is the inferior place of the woman in Cameroonian society. Women in many Cameroonian tribes in ancient times did not have a say in their choice for a husband. Their parents did. And whether she loved the husband or not, she was to respect the choice of the father. This is the reason why in the myth the princess is not given a voice to express her personal feelings and just follows her new husband to his village.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions

Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture

Adversity Animals Intellect Tradition Tricksters

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Further Reading	Matateyou, Emmanuel, *An Anthology of Myths, Legends and Folktales from Cameroon,* New York: The Edwin Mellen Press Ltd, 1997.
Addenda	Researcher: Amshetu Melo Forchu

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