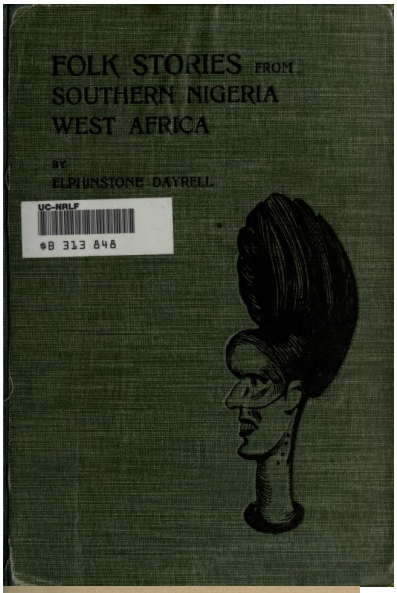
Chester Mbangchia, "Entry on: The King and the Ju Ju Tree by Elphinstone Dayrell", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke, Susan Deacy and Marta Pszczolińska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1306. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

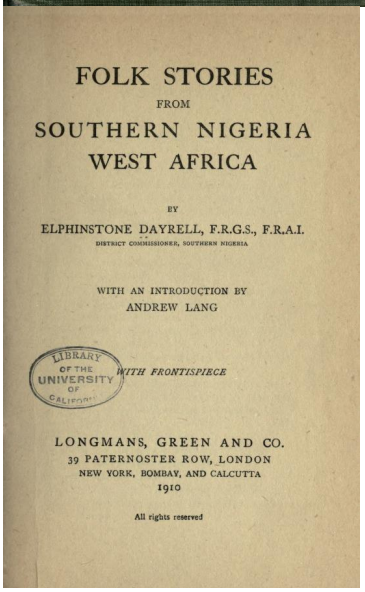
Elphinstone Dayrell

The King and the Ju Ju Tree

United Kingdom (1910)

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions





Cover retrieved from Internet Archive (accessed: August 4, 2021).

General information	
Title of the work	The King and the Ju Ju Tree
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	English-speaking Africa, UK, USA, India
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1910

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First Edition Details	Elphinstone Dayrell, "The King and the Ju Ju Tree" in *Folk Stories from Southern Nigeria, West Africa, by Elphinstone Dayrell, F.R.G.S, F.R.A.I., District Commissioner, Southern Nigeria; with an introduction by Andrew Lang*, London–New York–Bombay–Calcutta: Longmans, Green and Co., 1910, 98–103.
ISBN	not applicable for editio princeps
Available Onllne	The King and the Ju Ju Tree (accessed: August 4, 2021).
Genre	Folk tales
Target Audience	Crossover
Author of the Entry	Chester Mbangchia, University of Yaoundé 1, mbangchia25@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk Marta Pszczolińska, University of Warsaw, m.pszczolinska@al.uw.edu.pl

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Creators



Elphinstone Dayrell , 1869 - 1917
(Author)

Elphinstone Dayrell, a District Commissioner in the former Southern Nigeria, was a well-known writer who published in the domain of mythology and children's stories. He was a writer, folklorist and a politician. He is the author of *Folk Stories from Southern Nigeria, West Africa* (1910), a collection with several children's folktales and myths; *The Ikon Stories From Southern Nigeria* (1913).

Source:

Meneghelli Cassilhas, Fabrício Henrique and N'gana Yéo, "Dayrell, Elphinstone. *Concerning the Fate of Essido and his Evil Companions; The Woman with Two Skins; The King's Magic Drum*. Tradução, prefácio e notas," *Acácia – revista de tradução*, Florianópolis, 1, 2 (2018): 161-208 (accessed: April 9, 2020);

fairytalez.com (accessed: August 4, 2021).

Bio prepared by Chester Mbangchia, University of Yaoundé 1, mbangchia25@gmail.com

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Additional information

Summary

King Udo Ubok Udom, a very popular king, lived in the land of Itam and ruled over an inland town that had no river. He was a very committed husband and father to his wife and daughter, the latter of whom was now a full-grown and a pleasant-looking girl. King Udo was so fond of her that he considered her the apple of his eye. Having been away for two years, the king realized that the spring behind his house where he usually had his bath had been occupied by a gigantic tree. Consequently, he no longer had access to the spring. Something needed to be done to remedy the situation. The king ordered fifty of his men to destroy the tree with the aid of their machetes. Ultimately, the tree fellers realised it was impossible to cut down the tree, and then informed the king about it. Furious, he decided to destroy the tree himself. After the very first attempt to wound the tree, a piece of it entered his eye. The pain was so excruciating that he sent for a large number of witch doctors to restore his health. After casting lots to find out what was troubling the king, he was asked to offer a sacrifice with a series of items. Eventually, all his efforts of the witch doctors were aborted, and the king's pain was aggravated. Confused and desperate, he invited the second group of witch doctors, who upon arrival advised the king to invite a special witch doctor from the spirit land.

The healer from the spirit land came and imposed a condition that he would only attend to the king, if the king compensated him with his beloved daughter. Initially, the king was hesitant, but the pain increased in such a way that he finally and reluctantly succumbed to the healer's condition and was healed. After his princess' departure with the witch doctor to the spirit land, the king felt so bad to have sacrificed his only child for his eye. He declared three years of mourning throughout the entire land.

In the spirit land, the girl was locked up in a room where she was constantly given food. In this same room there was also a human skull, which played the role of a guardian angel to the girl. Each time the witch doctor brought food to her, the skull advised her not to eat. He further informed her that she was being prepared to be used as food for a feast, and not for marriage as she had thought. For three years she lived in this room, feeding only on chalk. When the time came for her to be used for the feast, the skull counselled her to escape back to her father. When her supposed husband had left the house for the

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forest to break the good news to his friends that he had somebody offer for a feast, she left the house via the back door, as she had been instructed by the skull. He also respected all the rules the skull gave her on her safety throughout her journey home. When the healer returned and discovered that she had left, he started pursuing her, while she began running as fast as she could. When she arrived back home, the king started panicking, for he anticipated the reaction of not only a witch doctor but the spirit land as a whole. The princess advised him to slaughter animals and use them as a sacrifice to the spirit healer. All of the sacrifice was thrown just at the entrance of the town. It was for the witch doctor to focus on it and forget to enter the town. When he came and saw so much meat, he dived in and started eating. After filling his stomach, he gathered the rest and returned to the spirit land. This situation served as an unpleasant lesson to the king. He warned that none of his subjects should enter any pact with people from the spirit land.

Analysis

The myth of *The King and the Ju Ju Tree* explains the routine practice of offering goats, chicken, oil and salt as sacrifices to the power that resides in trees among this particular African people. The act of paying a seer or diviner to resolve spiritual problems among mortals is not a unique practice of the Igbo in Nigeria. In all, the myth is a good source of inspiration to young adults who hear the story today. The myth teaches them what it means to be obedient when in depression, isolation or homesick, or when they are battling for survival.

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 Coming of age Depression Homesickness Isolation/loneliness Obedience Sacrifice

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Further Reading

Bischoff, Shannon T. and Carmen Jany, eds., *Insights from Practices in Community-Based Research: From Theory To Practice Around The Globe*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2018.

Valentin, Peter, *Jujus in the Forest Area of West Cameroon*, Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1980.

Addenda

Although these myths were collected so many years ago, they are still being told to children and young adults in traditional African communities. And like all other oral narratives, several versions of the same story may be available in different places.

Origin/cultural background:

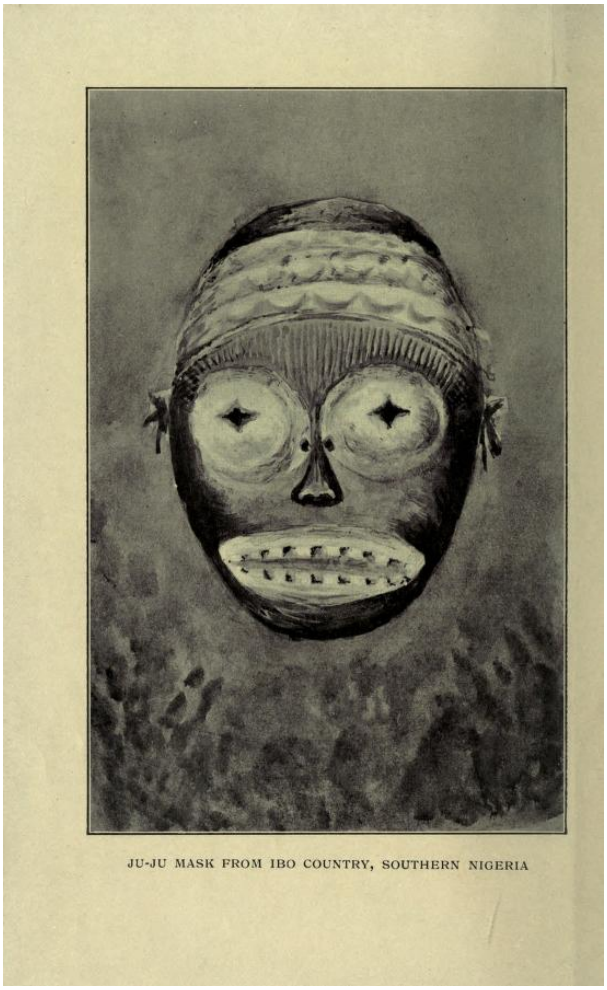
The Igbos are the second-largest group of people in Southern Nigeria, part of the Kwa sub-family of the Niger-Congo language family. They maintain fundamental beliefs that explain their origins, and their relationship with their ancestors, spirits and gods and supreme deity, Chukwu Abiama. They consider reincarnation as a binding force between the living and the dead. In addition, they firmly believe in the role of extended families in social cohesion, and perform periodic rituals for diverse purposes. Lastly, they firmly adhere to the rites of passage through birth, circumcision, marriage, and death.

Sources:

Njoku, John E. Eberegbulam, *The Igbos of Nigeria: Ancient Rites, Changes, and Survival,* Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 1990.

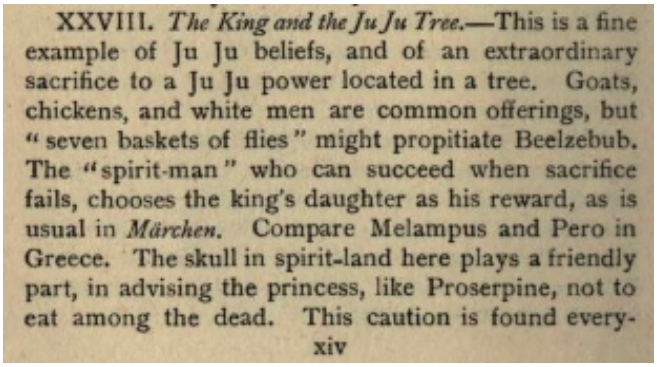
Igbo in everyculture.com (accessed: August 4, 2021)

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JU-JU MASK FROM IBO COUNTRY, SOUTHERN NIGERIA

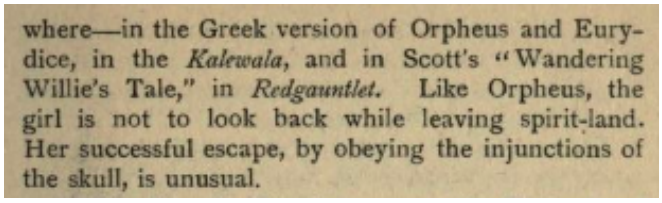
Juju mask, Ibo country, retrieved from Internet Archive (accessed: August 4, 2021).



XXVIII. *The King and the Ju Ju Tree.*—This is a fine example of Ju Ju beliefs, and of an extraordinary sacrifice to a Ju Ju power located in a tree. Goats, chickens, and white men are common offerings, but "seven baskets of flies" might propitiate Beelzebub. The "spirit-man" who can succeed when sacrifice fails, chooses the king's daughter as his reward, as is usual in *Märchen*. Compare Melampus and Pero in Greece. The skull in spirit-land here plays a friendly part, in advising the princess, like Proserpine, not to eat among the dead. This caution is found every-

xiv

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where—in the Greek version of Orpheus and Eurydice, in the *Kalewala*, and in Scott's "Wandering Willie's Tale," in *Redgauntlet*. Like Orpheus, the girl is not to look back while leaving spirit-land. Her successful escape, by obeying the injunctions of the skull, is unusual.

Fragments of Lang's introduction regarding *The King and the Ju Ju Tree*. Retrieved from Internet Archive (accessed: August 4, 2021).

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