Marie Charlaine Afuh Douovour, "Entry on: Kruku by Egbe Ifie", peer-reviewed by Divine Che Neba, Eleanor A. Dasi and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/177. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Egbe Ifie

# Kruku

*Nigeria (1999)*

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Underworld






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

| General information | |
|---|---|
| *Title of the work* | Kruku |
| *Country of the First Edition* | Nigeria |
| *Country/countries of popularity* | Nigeria |
| *First Edition Date* | 1999 |
| *First Edition Details* | Egbe Ifie, *Marriage with Gods and Goddesses*: *In Classical and African Myths*. Ibadan: End-time Publishing House Ltd, 1999, 199 pp. |
| *Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey* | 1999 (date of publication of the book from which the story was summarised) |
| *Genre* | Myths |
| *Target Audience* | Crossover (Young adults + adults) |
| *Author of the Entry* | Marie Charlaine Afuh Douovour, University of Yaoundé 1, afuh.marie@yahoo.com |
| *Peer-reviewer of the Entry* | Divine Che Neba, University of Yaoundé 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com<br>Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaoundé 1, wandasi5@yahoo.com<br>Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au |



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## Creators



### Egbe Ifie (Author)

Egbe Ifie was a teacher of Classical Mythology and African Cultures in the University of Ibadan, where he taught for several years. He is the author of several books, including on mythology. His date of birth is not available. He died some years ago.

Bio prepared by Carine Fonyuy, University of Yaoundé 1, lifotercarine@yahoo.com



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## Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

Cultural Background*: Delta Region, Nigeria.

The people of the delta region of Nigeria are generally migrant fishermen who migrated from Sierra Leone and Gabon. These people are used to water in a way, so much so that it is commonly said that wherever there is a river someone from the Delta region is not far. These fishermen practice two forms of marriages: a big dowry marriage (wherein tradition demands that the groom offers much payment to the wife's family) and a small-dowry marriage, (in which much money is not paid by the groom but succession is matrilineal). The small dowry marriages are the most frequent The populace venerate their ancestors and belief in the water spirit, Owuamapu part of their pantheon. Further, they practice divinations to interrogate the causes of death, and also perform rites that initiate members of different communities that are inserted in certain practices.

Sources:

*A brief walk into the lives of one of the world's most ancient people*, pulse.ng, May 1, 2018 (accessed: May 28, 2019).

Abi Alabo Derefaka, *Archaeology and Culture History in the Central Niger Delta*, Onyoma Research Publications, 2006, preview at africanbookscollective.com (accessed: April 23, 2019).

Summary

The original version of this myth appears in Egbe Ifie's *Marriage with Gods and Goddesses: In Classical and African Myths* published by End-time Publishing House Ltd, Ibadan, 1999: pp. 30–34. This is a summary of the myth. The full text can be read in the book cited above.

A long time ago, in the region of Aka, in the Delta State of Nigeria, a young man named Kruku embarked on a journey to the land of immortals or *Erivwin* after the sacrificial death of his parents. Overwhelmed by the poverty he had lived in ever since, he planned to purchase extraordinary kingly endowment from the gods. With this thought in mind he began to carefully prepare his long journey. He



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bought a bamboo basket, a bag made of straw, some yams, plantains and kola nuts. Then, with due delicacy, he cooked *Emaren* and *Ibu* meals: mashed yams and mashed plantains mixed with palm oil respectively, which he wrapped together with his other presents into the bag and packaged into the basket. Kruku was ready to journey to the unknown where his parents and other such iconic figures as Aziza, Ubrowo-vo-bo and Oghoro were.

Early the next morning, Kruku picked his baggage and set off. He walked a long distance crossing forests, villages and rivers. After climbing a half-slippery and half-rocky hill, he found himself at a crossroads. Lost in the confusion of which road to take, the wise young man feigned death. Lying down at the intersection, he placed the food he had cooked over his body and closed his eyes. Before long, somebody came round to the crossroads. He saw Kruku lying and took him for a dead mortal who had died in search of money to buy kingship from the immortals. Before leaving Kruku to his tragic destiny, the passer-by took a handful of *Emaren*, ate it and found out that it was tasty. He exclaimed:

“Oh, sweet savour of my living days, your suavity has remained unchanged.”

Having said this, he took a mouthful of *Ibu*, ate it and realised that it had become sweeter.

“Softness of my living days, if I could turn back the time!” he further exclaimed.

With his one third of the eye, Kruku unemotionally watched the stranger as he helped himself to a few slices of kola nuts. Then he heard him say:

“Sweet bitterness or bitter sweetness, how perfect you are!”

Before taking his leave, the passer-by indicated the way to *Erivwin* to the young man in these words:

“Go straight to your right and you will get to the world of the dead. May you spare my soul for I know nothing about your death. After all, you and I have no deal!”

When the immortal had vanished, Kruku woke up and followed the path he had been instructed to. He trekked again for countless



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kilometres before arriving at another road junction where he played the same trick. Again, another presence discovered the cunning mortal and did not relent in tasting the meals he had prepared. After savouring the delicious meal, he said the same things as the former and directed the way forth to *Erivwin* saying:

"Go straight to your left and you will arrive at *Erivwin*. At the far end, you will meet your mother at a well. May you spare my soul for I know nothing about your death. After all, you and I have no deal. Farewell."

The passer-by gone, Kruku got up and continued on his journey. As indicated by his second informant, he met his mother fetching water. The latter was baffled to see her living son in the world of the dead. She did not, however, bother him much with questions but rather saved him by hiding him in her water pot. Then she took him home and hid him in the ceiling.

Kruku was still in his hiding place when his father came in from a party half-drunk. Though in his half-drunken state, he could sense human presence. His wife tried to dissuade him, pretending to ignore her son's intentions. The son, from the ceiling, tricked his father by whistling like a mouse. Kruku's father was not friendly to mice. He thus swore to eat the one which was gnawing at the ceiling of his house. When he heard this, Kruku threw a handful of mashed yams at his father who enjoyed it without bothering about its source. Like the first two immortals, he exclaimed:

"Oh, sweet savour of my living days, your suavity has remained unchanged!"

Then his son threw some *Ibu* to him which he swallowed hungrily. After eating some nuts of the kola tree, he too remarked:

"Sweet bitterness or bitter sweetness, how perfect you are!"

Kruku's father was gradually getting back to himself. He could now identify his son. He called out his name and questioned him. "I wish I could be endowed with kingly power", he replied to his father, who, in view of the wisdom his son had shown, thought he deserved to be granted kingship.

Later that day, Kruku played the same trick on some of his father's friends, namely Ubrowo-vo-bo, the doubly-crippled immortal, Oghoro,



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who called himself the landlord of *Erivwin*, and Aziza, the half-man. They all agreed that Kruku deserved to be enthroned king.

Back to earth, Kruku reigned in the region of Aka. Unfortunately, his absolute power corrupted his personality. He preferred a girdle of gold to making himself a good name. He became tyrannical; deceiving the gods who had crowned him. He was deaf to any piece of advice on his management of the people. His ancestors became so angry that they sent emissaries to put him to trial but Kruku rudely killed them all. The gods sent other envoys who suffered the same fate. With a considerable number of victims at hand, they now had concrete evidence of Kruku's tyranny on his people. They summoned him to a higher court where he was judged and kingship withdrawn from him. He was made the poor man he had always been.

## Analysis

There is a general belief in most world cultures and mythologies that the dead are elevated to the ranks of the gods and can therefore intercede for the living or grant their wishes directly. That is why it is common practice, particularly in African cultures, to make requests from the gods through dead loved ones. It also explains why the dead are able to come back to earth in spirit forms to either avenge their deaths (in cases where their deaths were caused by someone), or protect those they left behind from some impending doom. Notwithstanding, there is also a possibility for mortals to journey into the world of the dead, but this is reserved only for the brave and intelligent because only they can be able to outsmart the dead to obtain their desires.

Kruku, in the above myth, is endowed with these qualities and is able to outwit the spirits of his dead father; his friends who then considered him full of wisdom and thus bestowed kingship on him. But again, as the gods give, so too do they take away, particularly when their gift is being abused. This is the fate that befalls Kruku, who becomes tyrannical and uses his power for evil rather than for good. The idea of journeying into the underworld and of surviving in both worlds suggests that the Urhobo people of the Delta State of Nigeria, are able to operate within the realms of the conscious and the unconscious worlds.

The myth of Kruku encourages bravery and intelligence but also warns against excess and tyranny.



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| Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts | African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Underworld |
| Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture | Character traits Death Journeys Morality Parents (and children) Religious beliefs Transformation Tricksters |
| Further Reading | Ifie, Egbe, *Coping with Culture*, Ibadan, Bomadi, Oleh, Ughelli: Oputoru Books, 1999.<br><br>Ifie, Egbe, *Marriage with Gods and Goddesses: In Classical and African Myths*, Ibadan: End-time Publishing House Ltd, 1999. |



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