Divine Che Neba, "Entry on: Origin and Settlement of the Kom People by Amos Bobe Ngong", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke and Katarzyna Marciniak and team members in Warsaw. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/186. Entry version as of November 01, 2026.

Amos Bobe Ngong

Origin and Settlement of the Kom People

Cameroon

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Hero(es)



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

General information	
Title of the work	Origin and Settlement of the Kom People
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Kom
Registration Files	Comments by Yong Belinda Kokoh (a research group member): "In the village, there is a 5-feet high statue in a shrine. This statue tries to bring out the history of the Kom people starting with the first King that committed suicide in Babessi (this could be seen at the bottom of the statue), followed by the python and then, the various Fons who had ruled the kingdom. Some of their carved footprints can be seen on the back of the snake on the statue. Behind the wall of the sacred house, the python trail is said to have disappeared. I was told that the kwi'foyn* gets a message of renewal for the people of Kom from here, when necessary. How this message is given, I was not told, because such information is not given to a woman." * Kwi'foyn constitutes the judiciary arm of traditional government in Kom and in most villages in the North West Region of Cameroon.
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Cameroon
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	November 11, 2016

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.

More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Akeh- Kom, North-West region of Cameroon
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover (Young adults + adults)
Author of the Entry	Divine Che Neba, University of Yaoundé 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com Katarzyna Marciniak and team members in Warsaw, University Warsaw, kamar@al.uw.edu.pl

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Creators



Amos Bobe Ngong (Storyteller)

Age of Narrator: 70 (in 2016)

Social status: King Maker (King makers are part of the judiciary in most kingdoms and chiefdoms in Africa)

Profession: Farmer

Language of narration: Kom

Bio prepared by Divine Che Neba, University of Yaoundé 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating	Background: Kom is an ethnic group in the North-West region of Cameroon. It is ruled by a powerful Chief who is called Fon, together with his advisers who are referred to as the Quifons. The people of Kom believe in ancestral spirits, ghosts. Christianity is the main religion. Occasion: Live performance.

Summary	Narrator: Moghaina (Should I say a story) Audience: Sighain (Yes, say it!) A long time ago, there were massive migrations of people from the North to the South of Cameroon. As a result, the Tikars entered the Mbam plain and a fraction of this group, the Kom people, broke off from them, travelled through Bamum and settled in Babessi in the Ndop plain where they met the Babessi (Shui*) people, who were already settled in that plain. These people happily welcomed the Kom people and coexisted with them for a long time without any problems. The two groups together with their respective leaders lived peacefully and jealously preserved their cultural identities for many years. However, in the course of their stay, the Kom population increased rapidly whereas that of the Babessi was almost stagnant. Similarly, the male folk from the Kom tribe were stronger than those of the Babessi. These factors made the Babessi chief jealous and the jealousy eventually grew into hatred and fear: they speculated that in the event of a war, the Kom people will defeat them woefully. In order to forestall this, the Chief of the Babessi hatched a Machiavellian** plot to contain the growth of the Kom population and executed it successfully. Acting according to the plot, the Babessi chief insinuated to the King of Kom that the population explosion within their respective communities was breeding a lot of disobedience. He went further to say that if things are allowed the way they were, then the strong breed of men among the new generation would eventually overthrow them and seize their thrones. Observing that the King of Kom was frightened by this revelation, he (the Chief of the Babessi) took advantage of the situation and

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cunningly suggested that the healthy and strong men in both communities should be eliminated and the weaker ones would be made to remain law-abiding forever. The King of Kom unwittingly accepted the proposal. The Babessi chief concluded his plot by suggesting that two large traditional thatched houses should be built; one for the Babessi people and another for the Kom people wherein those selected would be locked up and burnt.

Unsuspectingly, the King of Kom agreed with this proposal and set about the task of building his own house without further delay. He fortified the house and made it impossible even for a rat to escape from it, once it was locked. He built only one main door with excellent king facilities*** but the Chief of Babessi with his conspirators on the other hand built his own house and provided a main door and also a secret trapdoor behind the house facing the direction of their settlement. This was concealed to the Kom people but secretly revealed to the Babessi male folk.

On the day of the planned massacre, the two leaders carefully locked up the victims in their respective houses and set the houses ablaze. While the Kom people were burning only the Indian bamboos could be heard exploding in the house of the Babessi people. Many Kom people died in the fire whereas the Babessi people escaped through the trapdoor and reappeared in their settlement.

A few days after the burning of his able strong men, the King of Kom sat down in the “nsang” [courtyard] and was playing his “ilung-i tise’” [box guitar]**** tacitly grieving over his loss. But to his greatest dismay, he saw and identified some of the able strong men from the Babessi who were purportedly burnt, strolling around and going about their normal chores. Upon further inquiry, he discovered that he had been tricked into killing his own subjects. Filled with anger, he invited the Chief of Babessi for a brief meeting. When he came up to the palace, the King of Kom stopped playing his guitar and revealed to him what he had just realized. He went further to promise the Babessi chief vengeance and in conclusion, cursed him by stating that the population of the Babessi would remain stagnant whereas that of Kom would multiply like fish in water. After this curse, he took his guitar and struck the Babessi Chief on the forehead and the guitar got stuck on his head for ever.

As the Babessi Chief walked away in disgrace with the guitar stuck on his forehead, the King of Kom who was often referred to as

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Taŋnaŋkólí, called his sister, Nandong, and informed her of his revenge plan. He revealed to her that he was going to go away and hang himself on a tree and that when his body would begin to decompose, water would come out of his body to form a lake and maggots will fall out from his body and turn into fishes. He warned his people that, when the Babessi people discover the pond and start catching the fish in it, no Kom man should take part in their fishing expedition nor eat the forbidden fish. On the contrary, they should only go there to watch how one day the lake would turn upside down and bury the Babessi people. He pointed out that, as soon as it came to pass, a python trail "avi-a- ŋgɨm" [a path] would appear on the site to lead the Kom people to a suitable land where they would settle and become as numerous as fish in a lake. He concluded his Will by stating that wherever the python trail disappeared, they should settle and prosper.

The King of Kom went and hanged himself and things came to pass as he had prophesied. As soon as his body started decomposing and water and maggots began dropping from it, a pond full of fish developed under it. Then one day, a hunter of Babessi origin discovered this new pond in the bush, caught a lot of fish and took some to the Babessi Chief as a special gift. Shortly after, news of the treasure in the strange lake leaked out and soon reached each Babessi home. The Babessi Chief set aside a special day so that his people should catch fish in the marvellous pond for the royal household. On the appointed day, he personally went there (at the fishing site), installed himself nearby and supervised the fishing expedition. By midday when he had ascertained that his people had caught enough fish to fill the royal baskets and satisfy the needs of the royal household, he then ordered his people to go in one after the other and catch enough fish for themselves. Everybody rushed into the lake. As soon as most of the Babessi men, women, and children had gone into the lake, the lake suddenly turned upside down and buried all of them.

(Another version of the myth holds that the Babessi Chief, on realizing that the revenge of Taŋnaŋkólí had taken place, fell into the lake and drowned himself, whereas others hold that he abandoned the fish and went home with a handful of his subjects to lead an ever miserable life thereafter.)

As soon as the tragedy of the Babessi people became known, Nadong, who was privy to the Fon's [King of Kom]***** revenge plan, and the

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late Fon's successor, Fon Ba'tɨ-fuomûh (literally "pack up old things"), slowly and astutely prepared the Kom people for their departure from the cursed Babessi land. (In those days, it was so easy for a group to migrate even for a very flimsy excuse but that of the Kom people was a very serious one.) When the python trail eventually appeared, Nadong led the Kom people to follow it on their journey to the promised land.

The python trail led the remaining Kom people for several years in the wilderness until they finally reached their present destination. They travelled through Jakiri in Bui division to Ijim forest where they settled for some time before moving to Idien at Djotting where they settled near a stream beside a raffia bush. Here, the Queen mother, Tih, brought forth a son who was to be the next King after Ba'tɨfuomûh. The son was called Jingjua (meaning "Suffering Bears a Stream******"). The royal bangle (Jaa') was put on a bamboo which was cut from the raffia bush. (Before any Kom king is enthroned, a bamboo is always brought from this bush in remembrance of this event.)

After some time again, the python trail reappeared and moved on, then the Kom people followed it to Ajung where they again settled for a while. Here, the Fon of Ajung got married to Nangeh Tih******* and brought forth Njinabo, Nangebo, Nyangha, and Bi. Jingjua acted unwisely vis-à-vis his subjects, just as his predecessor had acted unwittingly by agreeing to the wicked plan proposed by the Babessi chief to eliminate all young men in the village. Jingjua's action prompted the Kom people to consider migrating again. One day, they left Ajung and were descending to Laikom, when the Ajung people who never wanted them to leave overtook them and tried to prevent them from leaving. Suddenly, the python trail re-appeared to them [the Ajung and the Kom people] and they [the Ajung] had to take an oath with the Kom people that a Kom man will never kill an Ajung man and vice versa.

This oath was taken on a sacred stone referred to as "Itɨɨ mɨɨkain." After the oath, as the Ajung people started ascending back to their village, the Kom people waved goodbye and told them to "ko' ajun" which literally means go up safely. Hence, the Ajung people derived their name from this farewell message.

After parting with their friends, the Kom people descended to Laikom and settled there where the python trail finally disappeared. Laikom is

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their present site. It is from this event of migration that the Kom derived its matrilineal succession. By this tradition, the Kom people consider their ancestor to be a Python, the reason why the Kom people do not eat pythons or any other form of snake.

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* “Shui” means the people from Babessi.

** In the original language: wicked, selfish, and of cunning character.

*** Not an ordinary lock. King facilities will be some traditional herbs and/or artifacts that are placed on the door to prevent any transgressor. This does not exist in modern Western cultures. Note that it might not be a very solid thing, but rather a portion prepared that no one dare touch it because of mystical forces behind it.

**** Terms from the Kom language.

***** Fon is the term for a ruler.

****** This expression in parentheses is proverbial in Kom culture. It may roughly be translated as “Suffering Brings Hope”: The Kom people consider water as a source of hope. Thus, when they came close to the stream their long desired hope of having a son who would be an heir to the throne became a reality.

******* Tih and Nangeh Tih are two different people.

Analysis

The history of migration and population movement in Africa is often characterized by tribal conflicts, with each group attempting to assert itself or forging a way to permanent settlement. This myth underlines, not only the intrigues involved, but the role of the supernatural in conflicts and in a people’s history. Here the snake and the lake of death are all introduced, with each playing a positive role to the Kom people. The serpent paves the way for the Kom people to a permanent settlement. Other tribes in Cameroon and Africa as a whole use the snake as personal totems. The lake of death brings to mind retributive justice especially to evildoers and those who reap where they have not sown. The positive role played by the snake and the lake indicates the usefulness of nature to humanity.

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Hero(es)
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Death Emotions Heritage Multiculturalism Revenge Sacrifice Society Transformation Travel Tricksters Violence
Further Reading	Gam Nkwi, Walter, “Kom in Geographical and ethnographic terms” in *Voicing the Voiceless: Contributions to Closing Gaps in Cameroon History, 1958–2009*, Langaa RPCIG, African Books Collective, Michigan State University Press, 2010, 16–19. Jick, Henry Kah, *Folklore and National Development: Kom and Bakweri Proverbs*, Scholars’ Press, 2015. Nsom, Joseph, *A Comprehensive History of the Kom Society,* Yaounde: Nyaa Publisher, 2015. Timgne, Ernest, *African Folk Tales from Kom Kingdom*, AuthorHouse, 2017.
Addenda	Method of data collection: Tape Recording. Researchers: Divine Che Neba and Yong Belinda Kokoh (trans.). Editor: Daniel A. Nkemleke.

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