Divine Che Neba, "Entry on: The Water God “Atutu” Marries the Most Beautiful Princess by Sama Ambe", 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/197. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

Sama Ambe

The Water God “Atutu” Marries the Most Beautiful Princess

Cameroon

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Gods





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

General information	
Title of the work	The Water God “Atutu” Marries the Most Beautiful Princess
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Bafut
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Cameroon
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	November 16, 2016
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Genre	Myths
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 Linguistic Review: Anna Olechowski

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Creators



Sama Ambe

Age of Narrator: 43/50 (in 2016/2017)

Social status: Aristocrat (Duke)

Profession: A Cook

Language of narration: Bafut

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

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

Background of Bafut: Bafut is located in the North-West region of Cameroon with an estimated population of over at 140,000 inhabitants spread over a land surface area of about 340 square kilometres. As Shu Abednego Che and Tanda Isidore Fuh rightly observed, in the *History of Bafut*, the first Bafut people migrated from Lake Chad down to the Tikari area North West of Fumban which had a dynastic rule. In constant search for fertile land and a more peaceful settlement, they migrated again to Ndobo (present day Ndop) and then down to Bafut where they finally settled. The people are called B+f++. The Fon who is a paramount leader, the head of the legislative wing of leadership in Bafut, is closely assisted. Batangchos (second class Fons), who all pay allegiance to him. Prominent religious festival in Bafut include Pacification of village Gods in all major shrines in Bafut; the wangle (Grass cutting ritual geared at protecting the village form enemies of all types, including neighbouring villages); worship of family Gods in family shrines; protection rituals at individual family and village levels. The people generally believe in the worship of ancestors, spirits, ghost, God, Gods. Most of the shrines of these gods are at the mountain sites, caves, in streams, lakes, valleys etc. The end-of-year religious festivals are crowned with the Fon dance (Abinimfor), which can be compared, for instance, to the Greek Dionysian festival*.

Occasion: Live performance.

* See: Nkemleke, Daniel A., Divine Che Neba and Eleanor A. Dasi, *Mythic Fulfillment and Performance in the Bafut Abinimfor and the Greek Dionysian Festivals.*

Summary

The form of the notation reflects the rhythm of the performance. Capital letters indicate when the storyteller’s voice was high; italics indicate when the voice was low.

I. The Princess and the Suitors

Long time ago

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There lived a beautiful princess,

SHE WAS TOO BEAUTIFUL.

She was known for turning down

All suitors.

She was always refusing these suitors,

And looking for the most handsome and richest men on earth.

The story went round the village,

People came from distant places

But nobody could marry her.

The news about the beauty of this princess

Was known even to the Gods of the land.

These Gods were living in a country,

Where everybody had only his head or multiple heads*.

The supreme God started wondering on what to do, so as to win her love.

He [God] moved round the village,

Borrowed the remaining parts of the human being,

Prepared himself.

He begged legs,

And put them on;

He begged hands,

And put them on;

He begged a stomach,

And put it on;

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He begged clothes,

And put them on.

He became a complete human being.

And was shining like the full moon in the dry season.

As he was ready, he entered into the palace.

His appearance alone was enough charm.

As the beautiful princess saw him,

She jumped out and started shouting:

“THIS IS MY HUSBAND!

THIS IS MY HUSBAND!

THIS IS THE PERSON!

THE ONE I AM GOING TO GET MARRIED TO!

THIS IS HIM!”

The father of the princess, who was the chief of the land, came out;

The man’s appearance impressed him,

He asked [his daughter]:

“Is this the one you have chosen?”

She said, “Yes.”

“Is this the one you are going to marry?”

She said, “Yes.”

“Is this your husband?”

She said, “Yes.”

The chief welcomed

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The water God [Atutu] and

Told him the bride price.

The water God left,

Prepared himself well,

Came back with a host of other gods, who had kept some of their heads behind

And who have all borrowed human parts.

They entered into the palace with food and drinks,

And people drank, drank, and drank, everybody was satisfied.

The princess was smiling,

Everybody was envying her,

The chief handed the beautiful

Princess to the water God, as a bride.

That was on “njweila’a.”**

The [people from the] palace led the bride and the bridegroom to

A good distance.

The husband [Sea God, i.e., Atutu] stopped them,

Thanked them, and asked them to go back.

They all went back.

II. The Princess’ Journey with Atutu

They continued their journey,

As they started penetrating

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Into the heart of the journey,

People were murmuring in

The nearby bushes [The storyteller speaks through the nostrils.]

“Give… Give… Give…”

(The princess could not understand what the people were murmuring about.)

The princess beckoned her husband [Atutu],

“Listen, listen, listen to what they are saying.

The voices started again,

“Give me my clothes! ”

He [Atutu] removed them and gave them back,

“Give me my legs!”

He [Atutu] removed them and gave them back,

“Give me my hands!”

He [Atutu] removed them and gave them back,

“Give me my stomach!”

He removed it and gave it back.

At this point, goose pimples came out on the princess’ body,

She was helpless, and didn’t know what to do.

They continued the journey, there was no turning back,

The “head” (now the only body part left as Atutu) was rolling

Kig kilkiglikigli, [mimic sound of a rolling head]

Kig kilikiglikigli,

Kig kilikiglikigli,

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And the princess was following him behind.

She was very worried

And asked: “What is wrong, my dear husband [Atutu]?”

Atutu hushed at her

And said: “Let us go!”

The princess was following him,

She began crying;

As they were going,

The road was closing up behind them,

The princess could not return,

Nor could she run away.

As she was crying,

Atutu started heading and hitting her,

She started rolling down the valley into a thick virgin forest.

They went and went and went,

They reached the Achum*** (Ox-bow Lake).

As they reached the Achum,

The water god Atutu hit her again.

And she fell into the waterfall “Tswong” [mimic a falling sound].

She went beneath the water and saw a new country;

Only the beasts of the like of Atutu were there,

They started living together,

She was merely a servant to the Gods in this new country;

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They stayed for more than three years,

And the princess was never seen by her family,

They stayed again for another year,

No news from her was heard by her parents.

III. The Search for the Princess

The mother of the princess asked:

“What type of a marriage is this?

A person who never thinks of his in-laws!”

She prepared food, and went out to search

For her son in-law’s compound.

She went and borrowed the wings of a hawk,

Wore the feathers,

Started flying and looking for

Her daughter.

As she was flying,

She reached the Achum.
She turned and looked down.

And saw how the Water Gods had removed her daughter out of the waterfall.

She looked very pale.

They had been giving her only little to eat,

And only the remnants of food.

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Atutu and his friends were preparing to kill her.

They had bleached oil in a big pot to fry her.

As the princess stood there,

She saw nothing that could

Carry the message to her parents.

She turned and looked up,

Saw a large hawk.

That was her mother.

It was the people of the village who had directed the hawk to Achum.

They told her [the mother] that the husband of the daughter [Atutu] was indeed a Water God,

That he had only his head and sometimes multiple heads.

She [the mother] ululated and exclaimed:

“Womeh, womeh, womeh! [The storyteller carries his left hand on his head, and beats his mouth with the right hand] Wulilili wulilili wulilili.”

She went back and narrated the story to her husband:

That their daughter

Got married, but to a Water God, Atutu.

She told the husband that their daughter is inside the waterfall.

And there is no way to remove her from there.

The brother also transformed into a hawk and started looking for

The house of the Water God.

One day, the brother was flying across Achum.

She [the princess] saw the hawk flying across,

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In desperation she sang to the hawk:

“If you go, tell my father that ooo Babamlenga tsikili ee,

They have cooked oil ooo Babamilenga tsikili ee,

There is a cutlass near the fire ooo Babamilenga tsikili ee,

They want to kill your princess ooo Babamilenga tsikili ee.”

The hawk [her transformed brother] listened to the song,

The voice was that of the sister [the princess],

But since she was too pale,

He [the hawk-brother] could not identify her.

She sang again:

“If you go, tell my father that ooo Babamilenga tsikili ee,

They have cooked oil ooo Babamilcnga tsikili ee,

There is a cutlass near the fire ooo Babamilenga tsikili ee.”

As he [the hawk] finally realized that the person was the sister [the princess],
He flew back home,

Reported the story to the parents

That he had seen the princess,

Tied near the Achum,

And she was very pale.

He told the parents that

The Gods are going to kill her.

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IV. The Village Hunt for Princess

The chief came out,

A village hunt was launched,

People came out with spears,

Cutlasses, guns, and all wild tools.

The gong was beaten,

Everybody was gathered in the palace.

The warlords went out,

Hid themselves near the Achum,

The other siblings who had wings,

Took the very first position,

The girl [the princess] came out,

And sang again,

The warlords came out.

Seized the princess and ran away with her.

One of the Water Gods came out to realize that the princess was no more there.

The other Gods [of the like of Atutu] came out with blades on their mouths,

They rolled up,

Invaded the palace [of the princess’ father]

And were singing:

“Arŋyeleŋyeleŋyele,

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Arŋyeleŋyeleŋyele,

Arŋyeleŋyeleŋyele.”

The warlords came out,

With guns pom pom pom,

The heads [the Gods] were only flying in the air,
Each time they [the Gods – Atutu and his cohorts] got up,

They fell with somebody’s head

That they have cut with the blades.

The chief [father to the princess] came out,
He too was killed.

All the heads of those who have been killed were gathered to the Achum.

That is the end of my story****.

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* “Atutu” in the local language – a creature that is only a head without the rest of the body.

** A kind of village ‘Sabbath’ day.

*** Achum is a sacred place of the people of Bafut in Cameroon. It has been the seat of the Fon’s palace for 400 years. The original building made from wood and bamboo was destroyed by German colonial forces in 1895 during the repressions as a consequence of an insurgence. Later reconstructed, the palace and the shrine underwent preservative treatment in the beginning of the 21th century under the patronage by the World Monuments Fund from New York, an organization protecting the monuments of architecture, see: *Bafut Palace*. wmf.org, accessed: August 22, 2018 (footnote by the UW part of the team).

**** Neither the Gods nor the people won because the Gods got the head of the people fighting and not the princess. The princess on her part ended up without having the ideal husband as she remained in

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	her father’s palace and vowed never to get married again.
Analysis	Though some women are happy with the compliment: "you are beautiful", this very beauty has brought untold misery to individuals and society. The worst part of the tragic story involving beauty in African mythology is that even the spirit world admires them. Many women, after rejecting human men end up in the hands of multiform beasts, water gods or divinities. In Elechi Amadi’s *The Concubine*, the village belle, Ihuoma ends up as a toy in the hands of human men and the water god. The battle over her beauty leaves three men dead and makes her life miserable on earth. In Greek mythology, the beaauty of Helen was one of the driving forces behind the Trojan War. This makes us see that beauty carries a degree of sorrow. The myth introduces us to the element of pride orchestrated by the heroine's beauty. After rejecting humanity, the beautiful princess ends up in the hands of a multiform beast, which ends up destroying not only the girl’s ambition of marrying a handsome man, but tears apart the entire kingdom. Atutu comes in as the hand of justice to punish pride.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Gods
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Appearances Death Journeys Love Magic powers Oppression Parents (and children) Princes and princesses Religious beliefs War Water
Further Reading	Myth *Mitidi – the Snake-man*, (accessed: December 20, 2020). *Myth of Ntiteuh (the Most Beautiful Woman on Earth) Who Married the Sky King*, (accessed: December 20, 2020). Werner, Alice, "The Were-Wolf Husband" in *Myths and Legends of the*

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Bantu, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1968, 190–191.

Addenda

Researcher: Divine Che Neba (trans.).

Editor: Daniel A. Nkemleke.

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