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Philip Loh Dzadjih

The Origin of “Efiehnstemseh,” the Great Cave of Drums in Kedjom

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 Origin of “Efiehnstemseh,” the Great Cave of Drums in Kedjom
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Ga’a-Kedjom
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Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	January 5, 2018
More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Kedjom Ketinguh
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover
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Creators

Philip Loh Dzadjih (Storyteller)

Age of narrator: 65 (in 2018)

Social status: Family Head

Profession: Farming

Language of narration: Ga’a-Kedjom

Bio prepared by Divine Che Neba, University of Yaoundé 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com and Didymus Tsangue, University of Yaounde1, tsanguedidymus@gmail.com

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

Background: The Kedjom people are believed to have migrated from the North-East of Cameroon like many other Tiker tribes. Oral narratives hold that they lived side-by-side with the Oku people until a dispute broke out over the ownership of Lake Oku. The Oku people were favoured and the Kedjom people had to move and join the Kom people. When the Fon (king) of Kom wanted to make them his subjects, they refused and migrated to their present site. Another dispute erupted within them and divided the kingdom in two: Kedjom Keku and Kedjom Ketinguh. Both kingdoms share a common ancestry and socio-political systems of governance. The Fon is the executive arm of the traditional government while the Kwifon is the judiciary arm. The people believe in the existence of a supreme deity and other deities, with the ancestors being chief mediators between humanity and the Gods. Their main occupation is subsistence agriculture*.

Occasion: Staged

* Yenshu Vubo, Emmanuel, *Itinerant craftmen Highland and the Royal Herdsmen: An Interpretation of Kedjom Historical Tradtions*, Limbe: Designed House, 2001.

Summary

Long long time ago, in Kedjom Ketinguh an extraordinarily beautiful girl, Shembom, was born to the Fon (or King). He named her Shembom, meaning the work of the Gods. As Shembom grew up, she became even more and more beautiful. Even as a girl, many families started competing for her hand in marriage. Her parents, however, rejected these offers. They wanted their daughter to grow up and choose a husband for herself among the most handsome men in the village. Eventually, two Gods fell in love with her and started fighting for her hand in marriage. Since these two Gods, Toh and Ngeh, could not resolve their conflict, they both agreed to ask the people to assist them in resolving the problem. The people overwhelmingly elected Toh by virtue of his loving kindness to the people as opposed to the indifference of Ngeh to the daily struggles of the people. However, Ngeh took this very unkindly and immediately declared war on Toh and the people, who had openly shown their loyalty to him. He started

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by launching a large massacre of the people in the scale of a genocide. The people cried out to Toh and he immediately came to their rescue. Because the Kedjom people were scattered across a vast terrain, the task of defending each of them was extremely difficult. So Toh climbed up to the hills at Mbuaten* and commanded two large rocks to come together. When this happened, a huge cave was created, large enough to contain the entire population. He then led them into the cave for safety. In order to beguile Shembom and her people, Toh provided them with drums and flutes, and asked them to be playing them for her delight while he took on Ngeh.

The next day, Ngeh rallied his forces, determined to wipe out the entire human population only to realize that the whole village was disserted. As he stopped short to think about it, he heard some music coming from the hills. In a great ravaging wind, he rushed to the hills in search of the people, and where the music was coming from. He then followed the music right to the mouth of the cave and just as he was about to storm into the cave, he was stopped at the entrance by Toh. In the fierce fight that ensued, Toh slaughtered Ngeh. Toh eventually took Shembom as wife but asked the people never to take out the drums from the cave. Once every year, the chief priest and priests in the Kedjom get into the cave and play the drum in honour of Toh but cannot take them out for fear that calamity might befall the people.

* A local government in Kedjom Ketinguh.

Analysis

This myth justifies the traditional annual practice of playing the drum in the cave in Mbuaten community every year in appreciation of the Toh, the god who delivered them from the hands of the wicked and vindictive Ngeh. The myth also shows an indigenous cosmology which consists of a supreme god and several gods who are sometimes at logger-heads at the top, the spirits of the ancestors and the people at the bottom. It also helps explain to children and young adults why homage is paid to particular sacred places in Kedjom Ketinguh. The myth once more brings into the limelight the idea that humanity is a play tool in the hands of the Gods.

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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 Conflict Girls Love Religious beliefs Tradition Violence
Further Reading	Chilver, Elisabeth M., “Does oral tradition deal with earlier lake disasters in the north West Province?”, *Education Review* (Limbe) 2/2 (1991): 16–22. Vubo, Emmanuel Yenshu, "Levels of Historical Awareness: The Development of Identity and Ethnicity in Cameroon (Niveaux De Conscience Historique. Développement De L'identité Et Ethnicité Au Cameroun)", *Cahiers D'Études Africaines* 43.171 (2003): 591–628 (accessed: January 24, 2021).
Addenda	Researcher: Divine Che Neba. Research Assistant: Regina Akuh Vegah. Method of data collection: Tape recording and note-taking. Editors: Eleanor A. Dasi and Daniel A. Nkemeleke.

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