Divine Che Neba, "Entry on: The Myth of Mnkong Moteh – The Enigma by Peter Mkong Bongjio", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke, Eleanor A. Dasi and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/609. Entry version as of November 15, 2026.

Peter Mkong Bongjio

The Myth of Mnkong Moteh – The Enigma

Cameroon

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions





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

General information	
Title of the work	The Myth of Mnkong Moteh – The Enigma
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Oku
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Cameroon
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	November 5, 2017
More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Oku
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover (young adults + adults)
Author of the Entry	Divine Che Neba, University of Yaounde 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaounde 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaounde 1, wandasi5@yahoo.com Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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.

Creators



Peter Mkong Bongjio (Storyteller)

Age of narrator: 66 (in 2017)

Social status: Ordinary Citizen

Profession: Retired teacher

Language of narration: Oku

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

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.

Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

Background*: The Oku people are part of the Tikari tribe who migrated from the West Region. The kingdom is made up of about 34 villages ruled by second class and third class chiefs. Its system of traditional rule is a kind of federation, with the kwifon secret cult as the highest organ in the land. The land has natural endowments such as Mount Kilum (the second highest in West Africa after mount Fako) which holds endemic species of plants and animals, caves, waterfalls and the mythical lake Oku. The people are engaged in craftwork, farming and sculpting. Oku has one of the best honey industries that produce pure natural honey in the whole country. Most Oku people have embraced Christianity, but some still practice ancestral worship. Like many other Africans, the Oku person believes in the power of the gods and ancestors over human life and other natural phenomena. This explains why one of the most important shrines in Oku land (known as Lumetu), at the foot of the Kilum mountain, which is visited by the Oku king and chiefs annually, is dedicated to Mnkong Moteh.

Occasion: staged

* See here (accessed: January 9, 2019).

Summary

A long time ago, a man appeared around Lake Oku. No one knew where he came from. He did not have any known parents or relatives, and spent all of his time near the lake and in the sacred forest of Lumetu. His name was Mnkong Moteh, and he came up during the reign of Nghanga, son of the legendary Nyanya, founder of the Ntul dynasty. Though Nghanga had mystical powers that he inherited from his mother, Mnkong Moteh fought and won Nghanga in a spiritual war that was fought in the lake, burnt most of the Ntul people alive, then subdued the rest and brought them under Oku.

He was seen as a devilish king because of the many mysterious deeds he performed. At one time, there was very severe drought in Nso land, which resulted from a misunderstanding between the Oku and the Nso people. Because of this, the Nso people planned to attack the Oku people but before they could execute their plan, most of their streams,

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.

springs and rivers dried up. In fact, there was no sign that the drought was anything near ending. So, the Nso people sought peace. Mnkong Moteh took a basket made of bamboo pith, carried water in it, and took to Nso. While there, he asked for certain rituals to be performed. Once that was done, he gathered a number of notables, said some incantations, and raised the basket up into the sky. Immediately the sky broke loose and rain fell as the people had hardly ever seen before, bringing back the streams and rivers.

Before he died, he instructed his successor to bury him in the sacred forest, but the latter thought he would be better honoured if buried in the tomb for kings. His spirit could not rest in the tomb. So on the day sacrifices were being offered to bid him final farewell on his journey to the spiritual realm, his spirit transformed into a royal python (with cowries on the head) and moved away to settle in the sacred forest at Lumetu. As he moved, he left a trail marked by camwood, which the chief priests traced in order to find his final dwelling place. There, a shrine was built in his honour, which is one of the major shrines in Oku today. Yearly sacrifices are offered in this shrine to ask for protection and provision, after which the royal python that holds Mnkong Moteh's spirit also visits the palace. It is because of this, and other facts, that Mnkong Moteh is worshipped as a god. He is also considered one of the founding fathers of Oku so much so that he is always being mistaken to have been the first Chief.

Analysis

The myth of Mnkong Moteh emphasizes the role of collective memory in constructing a unique identity around shared experiences and a common heritage. Collective identity that is recognized both by the members of the ethnic group and outsiders, based on heroic actions and exploits of an individual, or a group, constitutes an important cultural repertoire. This gives a sense of cultural solidarity against adversity be it natural or man-made. The above myth also highlights the heroic deeds of a hero amid great adversity, but who, by dint of courage, extraordinary strength, and sometimes divine help, is able to overcome and establish himself as ruler or deity.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs,

African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions

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.

Characters, and Concepts

Further Reading

Hamilton, Edith, *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes*, London: Black Dog & Leventhal, 2017.

Myth *The Origin of Lake Oku* (accessed: December 14,2020).

Addenda

Researcher: Divine Che Neba.

Research Assistant: Mkong Cynthia Mboh.

Editor: Eleanor A. Dasi.

Method of data collection: Tape recording.

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.