Divine Che Neba, "Entry on: The Origin of Lake Oku 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/611. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Peter Mkong Bongjio

The Origin of Lake Oku

Cameroon

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions



Lake Oku. Public domain. Retrieved from Wkimedia Commons (accessed: November 22, 2022).

General information	
Title of the work	The Origin of Lake Oku
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

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Creators



Peter Mkong Bongjio (Storyteller)

Age of narrator: 66 (in 2017)

Social status: Ordinary Citizen

Profession: Retired teacher

Language of narration: Oku

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

Background: Please, see here.

Occasion: staged.

Summary

A long time ago, a wandering traveler, who had apparently been rejected in many places, arrived the Oku Chief's palace. He looked very exhausted and had unkempt hair. He was well received and after a brief stay, he expressed his desire to stay and put an end to his wandering life. The Chief of Oku showed him a site on which to settle at Itoh, not too far from the palace. He complained, indicating that he would have preferred a place much farther, so that he could have enough land for himself and his family.

The Chief granted his request and pointed to the site where the lake is today. Incidentally, the Kejem (Babanki) people were living around the same place. The wandering visitor then went to settle there. He arrived when most of the villagers had left and were going about their daily chores, mostly in the farms and forest. He was tired and hungry. He then moved around begging for food and water from the children. Some responded positively and gave to him but the selfish ones did not only refuse, but made a mockery of him. He responded by telling the good ones to move to a nearby hill if it started raining. The selfish ones were told to remain in the valley and gather the tadpoles that would fall with the rain. Not long after that, there was a storm accompanied by heavy rain, with tadpoles falling along with it. The greedy children rushed for the tadpoles and ended up drowning in the waters (which now formed the lake). Meanwhile, the good children were safe at the top of the hill.

Parents, on returning from the farms and forests, were alarmed to see what had happened. The parents of the good children were relieved to see their children safe on the hill top while the parents of the greedy children went wailing in despair, and most of them decided to leave that area and settle elsewhere.

However, for those who remained around the lake, a controversy soon erupted about the ownership of the lake. The issue was — did it belong to the Oku people or to the Kejem people? To solve the problem, the Chiefs of the two villages were asked to come, each of

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them with a goat. Each of the Chiefs was to get into the lake with his own goat as an offering to the lake god. He whose goat was accepted was the owner of the lake. The two Chiefs then got into the lake, each carrying his own sacrifice of a goat. Suddenly, blood appeared on top of the waters of the lake around where the Chief of Oku had gone in. the Oku people started wailing in despair, thinking that their Chief had been killed. The Kejem people went into wild ecstasy believing they had won the day. Nevertheless, that was not the case; the Chief of Oku suddenly emerged from the waters wearing an exotic large white feathered cap called "kefol ə mbong", (kefol meaning cap mbong being the bird from whose feathers the cap was made), while the chief of Kejem never came out of the lake.

To this day, the Chief of Oku visits the lake once every year, to perform rituals and offer sacrifices. It is believed that the lake used to transform into a big village at night; lively with every sort of human activity, and in the early hours of the morning, it transformed itself back to water. This stopped when one curious man decided to climb into a tree one night to see how the transformation took place and how the village in the lake looked like. The following morning, the water of the lake could not fully come round as it usually did. Angry at this, the spirits of the lake dispatched a swarm of bees which attacked the imposter on the tree and stung him, till he fell into the lake. The water of the lake then covered its normal surface. From then, the night village of the lake vanished.

Analysis

This myth reiterates the sacredness of places like lakes, caves, and trees, which in African, and other world cosmologies, are believed to be the abode of the gods and ancestors.

The idea of the intervention of the gods and the ancestral spirits in human activities, especially disputes, is brought to focus as an important element in human relations across generations and cultures. The myth emphasizes the respect of the gods as all-knowing, thus, humans should not seek to understand divine mysteries. It also confirms the widely held belief that the realm of the spirits is a world of its own with activities going on much in the same way as the living experience. Finally, the myth acts as a morality tale to children and young adults to uphold the virtues of unconditional love and respect for adults as laid down in traditional African societies.

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions
Further Reading	Gufler, Hermann J., "Reenactment of a Myth. The Fon of Oku Visits Lake Mawɛs (Cameroon)", *Anthropos* 104.2 (2009): 347–357 (accessed: January 24, 2021). *The Myth of Mnkong Moteh – The Enigma* (accessed: December 14, 2020).
Addenda	Researcher: Divine Che Neba. Research Assistant: Mkong Cynthia Mboh. Editors: Eleanor A. Dasi. Method of data collection: Tape recording.

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