Eleanor A. Dasi, "Entry on: The Bakossi Animal Dance by Cosmas Njume Njume", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke, Divine Che Neba and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/626. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Cosmas Njume Njume

The Bakossi Animal Dance

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 Bakossi Animal Dance
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Akoose
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Cameroon
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More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Bangem
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover
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Creators



Cosmas Njume Njume (Storyteller)

Age of Narrator: 65 (in 2019)

Social status: Initiate

Profession: Retired Soldier

Language of narration: Akoose

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

Background: The Bangem people of the South West region of Cameroon, like most other tribes in Cameroon believe in gods, ancestors and spirits. Although Christianity is well entrenched, many people here are very much attached to traditional values. There are various traditional ceremonies to mark the passage from youth to adulthood, and during birth and deaths, various rites. are also performed.

Summary

Before the Bakossi people found themselves on the land which they presently occupy, Mwankum had been living on it. When the people knew about his presence, they acknowledged him as their god because they believe he alone knows their origin. They started worshipping him as the protector and defender of their ancestral land. He communicates and acts through his servants, who are initiates. He, however, acknowledges the presence of a bigger god, who reigns above him. He is a lover and keeper of peace, and serves as the final judge during disputes. Mwankum's masquerade comes out only at night. He announces his arrival with a thunderous noise that is heard in an area of seven square kilometers. It takes him a minute to go through a distance of about ten kilometers. No light is permitted in his presence, and no woman is allowed to set eyes on him. Men who are non-initiates in the secret society also stay indoors like the women and children when the Mwankum passes.

Every male, according to the Bakossi tradition, is supposed to be initiated into the society as a rite-of-passage into adulthood or manhood. Faithful servants of Mwankum belong to the Bakossi secret society called Ahon. Prominent members include elders of the tribe and people with special gifts from the gods. These men are servants to Mwankum, especially when it comes to performing rites-of-passage. Young men who are ripe for the rite undergo preparation in the forest, and are later taken to his dwelling in mount Kupe, where the rites are completed with a sermon and illustrations of what manhood is all about.

There came a time when the people wanted to showcase the power given them by Mwankum. The leaders and priests then came up with the Animal Dance. The villages came out in their numbers to watch

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men transform into different animals amidst the drumming and dancing of the Ngone (Bakossi traditional dance) in honor of Mwankum. The process of transformation for initiates into different animals was very easy. They simply had to eat some sacred herbs from the forest and they would be transformed from human to animal and vice versa.

Mukolomonzoh was the mask carrier and Priest of the Ahon sacred society. He was feared and respected by all as a demi-god because he represented Mwankum among men. No man born of a woman dared to challenge him. Mwankum was equally a god of war, who would go out to empower men with a broomstick, and women with basket ropes to defeat their enemies. The Bakossi people believe that Mukolomonzoh did not die but disappeared after a foreigner tried to find out the secret of Mwankum. Before he disappeared, he made the initiates swear an oath of sealed lips, never to reveal the secret of the Mwankum to a stranger. His name is on the lips of all Bakossi people as they continue to worship and sing his praises everywhere.

Analysis

Like many other African cultures, the Bakossi believe in the existence of gods and spirits to whom they owe their origin. As related in the myth, the Mwankum is the guiding spirit god of the Bakossi people and came from the void. Though it is not clear from the myth how he created the people, they however trace their origin to him. He resides in his mountain (Mount Kupe), though he also parades the forest especially during initiation of men into his secret cult. The Mwankum is god of justice as seen in his overall judgement during disputes and his mystical empowerment of his people during wars. He announces his presence with a thunderous sound.

The myth also lays emphasis on shapeshifting, though not for punitive measures and amorous adventures, but in a mystical show of pride, reverence and superhuman qualities for the god of the Bakossi land. Furthermore, the cult of Ahon foregrounds the belief system of the Bakossi people much in the same way as those of other world cultures. The role of Mukolomonzoh as chief priest of Mwankum in the myth brings to mind Hermes as messenger and emissary of the gods in ancient Greece. In sum, the myth, like many other myths of cosmogony, transmits the Bakossi world view and how these people relate with the rest of the world.

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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	Animals Coming of age Initiation Justice Religious beliefs Society Tradition Transformation Values
Further Reading	Ittmann, Johannes, "Von Totengebräuchen und Ahnenkult der Kɔsi in Kamerun", *Africa* 26 (1956): 380–397. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/1156675; online: cambridge.org (accessed: August 16, 2021). Mutaka, Philip, "The Concept of the Mwankum among the Mbo and the Bakossi" in Shannon T. Bischoff and Carmen Jany, eds., *Exploring new research perspectives on African cultures through language documentation*, series: Trends in Linguistics. Studies and Monographs [TiLSM], vol. 319, *Insights from Practices in Community-Based Research: From Theory To Practice Around The Globe*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2018, 284–285; online: books.google.pl (accessed: August 16, 2021) Nkunde Ewanoge, "The Mwankum juju and the Mwankum secret cult in the Bakossi land" in Ngessimo M. Mutaka, ed., *Evanescent African cultures. Cultures africaines en Perdition*, Create-Space Self Publishing, 2019. Valentin, Peter, *Jujus in the Forest Area of West Cameroon*, Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1980; online: books.google.pl (accessed: August 16, 2021).
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