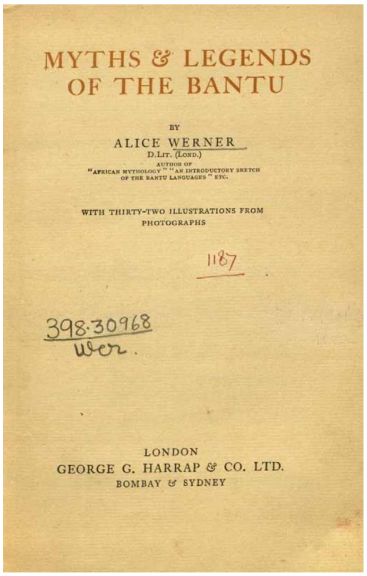
Chester Mbangchia, "Entry on: Liongo Fumo by Alice Werner", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke, Susan Deacy and Marta Pszczolińska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/760. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Alice Werner

Liongo Fumo

United Kingdom (1933)

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions



Cover from The Archaeological Survey of India, Central Archaeological Library, New Delhi, Book Number: 1187.

General information	
Title of the work	Liongo Fumo
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and English-speaking West, Southern and Central Africa (Cameroon), United KIngdom, United States of America
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1933
First Edition Details	Alice Werner, "Liongo Fumo" in *Myths and Legends of the Bantu*, London: George G.Harrap & Co., Ltd., 1933, 145–154.
ISBN	Not applicable for editio princeps
Available Onllne	*Liongo Fumo* (accessed: July 28, 2021).
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover (children and young adults)
Author of the Entry	Chester Mbangchia, University of Yaoundé 1, mbangchia25@gmail.com

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Creators



Alice Werner , 1859 - 1935
(Author)

Alice Werner (June 26th, 1859 – June 9th, 1935), born in the Imperial Free City of Trieste on the Austrian Littoral, was a German linguist, writer, minor poet and teacher. She was one of the pioneers of African Studies in the twentieth century. She studied at Newnham College at Cambridge University. Her visits to Nyasaland and Natal reinforced her scholarly interests in Africa. In 1917, when the School of Oriental Studies (later SOAS University of London) opened its doors to students, she began teaching Swahili and Bantu continuing this work until her retirement, as professor emerita, in 1930. Two years earlier, she obtained there her PhD in Literature. She also taught at Oxford and Cambridge. She was awarded the Silver Medal by the African Society in 1931. Her poem *Bannerman of the Dandenong. An Australian Ballad made* her popular in New Zealand, Australia and other parts of the world. However, her major achievement remains her book *Myths and Legends of the Bantu* (1933). It presents the beliefs of the Bantu, their origins, their gods and their myths. Werner's earlier important publications include: *Introductory Sketch of the Bantu Language* (1919), *The Mythology of All Races, vol. VII.: Armenian,* by M.H. Ananikian, *African*, by Alice Werner (1925). She died in London at the age of 75.

Sources:

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digital.soas.ac.uk (accessed: July 28, 2021).

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Additional information

Summary

The myth of Liongo Fumo* is about a Swahili poet, warrior, and hero who braved diverse barriers till his death. He was a tall and brave man whose younger brother, Shah Daudi Mringwari, the Sultan of Pate, hated him. Their polygamous father, Shaka Mashah, favoured the latter because the former's mother was more miserable. However, Liongo's extraordinary stature, fighting and poetic skills gained the attention of many. His brother's jealousy leads him to plot to get rid of him, fearing that he would usurp his unlawful throne. To complete his machinations, Mringwari arranged a marriage between his elder brother and an attractive Galla woman. All this to make his brother remain in the Galla county away from Pate, his hometown. When Liongo married and settled in Galla, Mringwari offered rewards to Waanye and Wadahalo men to cut off his head. Unluckily for them, Liongo confronted them and escaped to Pate, where Mringwari further sent men to imprison him. Although they succeeded in capturing him with chains, he composed songs sent to his mother, pleading she organises a feast where the song would be chanted. During the feast, the loudness and sweetness of the sounds distracted the guards, and he escaped by cutting his chains off. Mringwari now plotted to kill him through his brother's son, whom he had had with the attractive Galla woman. Mringwari promised to reward the boy with the royal treatment and the promise of a marriage if he would find out his father's weakness, seeing as different warriors had used tools that could not kill him. The boy, cunningly, went to his father to enquire about his weakness. Although Liongo knew the boy's wicked intentions, he revealed that he could be killed with a secret weapon, a copper nail stubbed exactly into the navel. The boy returned and informed Mringwari, who gave him a tool with which to slay his father. Finding his father asleep, the boy daggered him and escaped. Liongo struggled with the wounds to the village gate, where he knelt with his bow and arrows. People feared going close to him for three days, thinking he was not dead, until his mother spoke to him. However, she discovered he was dead, and was quickly buried where his grave is still visible today. The son who had murdered his father prided himself in front of the Mringwari. The villagers and his mother considered him a traitor; they seized and killed him, but no one mourned.

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	* Although this myth was collected many years ago, it is still being told to children and young adults in traditional African communities. And like all other oral narratives, several versions of the same story may be available in different places.
Analysis	This myth depicts the African belief and worship in particular locations, precisely where certain heroes were buried or performed mighty and remarkable deeds. Hence, the places are made special to honour the heroes. Further, the myth's presentation of a charmed life protected against every weapon of destruction but vulnerable in one flaw aligns with the familiar Greek myth of Achilles. Liongo Fumo accurately represents admirable traits like heroism, bravery, courage, humility, justice and the offering of oneself as the ultimate sacrifice for society. Liongo Fumo's epic quality and his journey from Shaka to Pate city in two days, his use of poetic skills to escape jail, the presence of an evil and betraying protagonist, parallel adventurous and brave journeys and lifestyles of other heroes. The myth, thus, describes heroism, bravery, and the display of wit and strength, relevant qualities for young adults since they need such qualities to be the leaders of tomorrow.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Character traits Conflict Disobedience Heroism Isolation/loneliness Justice Murder Punishment Rejection
Further Reading	"A Swahili History of Pate", *African Affairs* 54 (1915): 148–160, doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.afraf.a099367 (accessed: July 28, 2021).

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Addenda

Alice Werner mentions bishop Steer as her source of the tale. She writes: *Bishop Steere wrote, in 1869, that* "the story of Liongo is the nearest approach to a bit of real history I was able to meet with. It is said that a sister of Liongo came to Zanzibar, and that her descendants are still living there" (p.145).

see: Steere, Edward, *Swahili Tales. As Told by Natives of Zanzibar. With an English Translation*, London: Bell & Daldy, 1870.

Origin/cultural background:

The countries on these maps represent the Bantu in the low-lying hills and coastal plains, part of the Sub-Saharan ethnic group of the Banu, Swahili cluster, who speak Swahili. They are predominantly Muslim traders who deal with salt, fish rhinoceros hides and ivory but also raise livestock. Their traditional setup is matrilineal, as their children belong to the women's clan and the line of descent is traced through females. They are generally polygamous and in families, the birth of girl children is welcomed with much joy. To them the rustling of a leaf indicates the passing of spirits; the eclipse of the moon shows a celestial war; poison or witchcraft is the cause of most cruel deaths and their honoured spirit, *kolelo,* resides in caves and they perform ceremonies to purify their land after every harvest.

References:

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