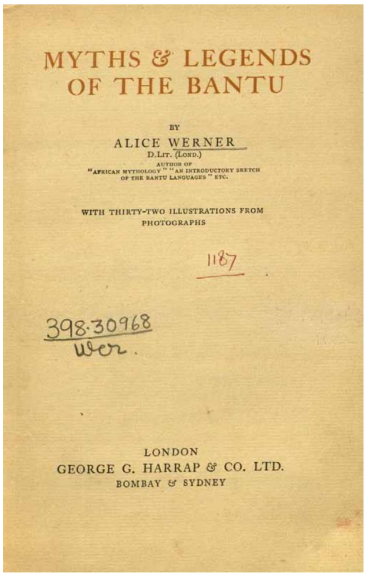
Chester Mbangchia, "Entry on: The Swallowing Monster by Alice Werner", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke, Elżbieta Olechowska and Marta Pszczolińska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/781. Entry version as of November 19, 2026.

Alice Werner

The Swallowing Monster

United KIngdom (1933)

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Monsters



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

General information	
Title of the work	The Swallowing Monster
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	English-speaking African countries, United KIngdom, United States of America
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1933
First Edition Details	Alice Werner, “The Swallowing Monster” in *Myths and Legends of the Bantu*, London: George G.Harrap & Co., Ltd., 1933, 206–221.
ISBN	Not applicable for editio princeps
Available Onllne	*The Swallowing Monster* (accessed: July 29, 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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Additional information

Summary

The summary refers to the legend *Khodumodumo*, or *Kammapa*, a version of the *Swallowing Monster* myth according to the Basuto people (pp. 208–209)*.

The swallowing monster is a South African myth that tells the story of a huge amorphous monster called Khodumodumo or Kammapa**, that swallows a whole village and is killed by a heroic little boy. According to the myth, the monster appeared in numerous villages and swallowed everything and everyone that stood in its way: cattle, goats, fowls and humans. When it arrived in the last village, it swallowed everyone, except for a pregnant woman who escaped into a calf's cage, masked herself with ashes and remained still. When the monster arrived, it mistook her for a stone and left. It could not leave the village because it had become too big after swallowing everything, and the entrance gate was narrow. Consequently, it sat there waiting for the objects and people it had swallowed to digest. In the meantime, the hidden woman gave birth to a boy; she named him Ditaolane and left to find something he could sleep in. When she returned, the boy had grown up and was a grown man; he held three spears in his hand, and a string of bones hung around his neck. She called to him and asked for her child, but the man told her he was indeed the child. The man directly asked about the whereabouts of the people and animals in the village. When his mother informed him that a monster had swallowed everybody, he descended to the valley where the monster lay. The man sharpened his spears and attacked the beast that opened its mouth to devour him. With his prowess, he escaped and pierced the monster, killing it. The man then started shredding it up with his knife. When he started, a man cried from the belly of the creature, pleading that the boy should not kill him. Again, he cut another part, and this time, it cut a man's leg, but the man was alive. He cut the other parts carefully, and all the animals and people that were swallowed were released. When they came out, they thanked him, praised him and appointed him their chief. Back in the village, they brought him gifts and their daughters for marriage. He married the ones he selected, and all of them lived happily.

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* Although this myth was collected so many years ago, it is still being told to children and young adults in traditional African communities.

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And like all other oral narratives, several versions of the same story may be available in different places.

** A gaping-mouthed bush monster in South Africa.

Analysis

The Xhosa myth of the Swallowing Monster strikingly illustrates the remarkable transformation of a child to a man and how he bravely saved the people of his land from the hand of a fierce monster. His actions are analogous to boys' in many mythologies, who were miraculously gifted. The ultimate victory of the hero-child, Ditaolane, is common in myths and tales throughout the world. In conclusion, there are universal themes. Within Africa, there are variants of this same myth*.

* There is a similar myth in *The Hero with an African Face: Mythic Wisdom of Traditional Africa* by Clyde W. Ford (1999), 36–37, published by Bantam Books in the USA.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Monsters

Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture

Adversity Freedom Good deeds Heroism Respect Revenge Transformation

Further Reading

Hitchens, William, *African Mystery Beasts*, London: Mercury House, 1937, 369–373.

Jacottet, Edouard, *Contes populaires des Bassoutos*, Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1895 (accessed: July 29, 2021).

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"Lituolone" in Clyde W. Ford, *The Hero with an African Face: Mythic Wisdom of Traditional Africa*. New York: Bantam Books, 1999, 36–37

Daniel A. Nkemleke, "Entry on: Lituolone by Clyde W. Ford", peer-reviewed by Courage Yaah and Elizabeth Hale, Our Mythical Childhood Survey (accessed: July 29, 2021).

Addenda

Origin/cultural background:

The Xhosa, also written as isiXhosa (it consists of subgroups like Mpondo, Mpondomise, Xesibe, Thembu, Bhaca, Bomvana, and Mfengu), are eastern South Africans, but it is also a Nguni Bantu language of South Africa and Zimbabwe. According to the people's oral tradition, their creator deity is Xhosa, also called uQamata or uThixo. He is honoured through sacred rituals. The Xhosa rite of passage starts from birth with babies' umbilical cords burned to inoculate them against mischievous spirits. In addition, boys and girls go through a circumcision rite when they are to be initiated into adulthood. The girls’ circumcision does not involve surgical procedures. The sacrifice of a goat typically marks the initiation processe. Like most African ethnic groups, the Xhosa worship ancestors and spirits.

References:

Zenani, Nongenile. *The World and the Word: Tales and Observations from the Xhosa Oral Tradition*. Collected and Edited by Harold Scheub. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.

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