
Thomas Essa Ngoukou

The Mysterious Staff of Ngat

Cameroon

TAGS: [African Mythologies](#) [African Storytelling](#) [African Traditions](#) [Gods](#)



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General information	
<i>Title of the work</i>	The Mysterious Staff of Ngat
<i>Country of the First Edition</i>	Cameroon
<i>Country/countries of popularity</i>	Cameroon
<i>Original Language</i>	Ewondo

<i>Registration Files</i>	 Mr Ngoukou Essa Thomas (92 years old) and Larissa Aïcha Saïd during a myth narration session in the village of Ngat in Awae area, some 80 km from Yaoundé.
<i>Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database</i>	Cameroon
<i>Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Database</i>	November 30, 2019
<i>More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database</i>	Nkol Essong Ngat village in Awae, Yaoundé area
<i>Genre</i>	Myths
<i>Target Audience</i>	Crossover
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Creators



Thomas Essa Ngoukou (Storyteller)

Age of narrator: 92 (in 2019)

Social status: Notable of the village

Profession: Retired farmer

Language of narration: Ewondo

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

The Awae people, also known as Mvele, are members of a bigger clan known as the Beti-Fang. The Beti-Fang are to be found in the Centre region of Yaoundé, the political capital of Cameroon. But they are also found in several countries in Central Africa including Gabon, Central Africa Republic, Congo DRC etc. Before the introduction of Christianity, many of these people were animists, precisely because they were surrounded by forests and they believed that the gods lived in the trees and in caves. Although Christianity has radically transformed these local beliefs, many are still deeply animist. The practice of ancestral worship is also still very present especially in villages, but less so in big cosmopolitan towns such as Yaoundé, Ebolowa, Sangmalima. There are a lot of minor cultural differences between the various tribes within this bigger clan, but they all share a common belief that the spirits of their ancestors live on and guide them in this world. And that through certain rituals, these spirits can be invoked so that they provide clues how certain problems facing the society. Some elders in these communities claim that they can even speak directly to the spirit of the dead upon recital of certain prayers. This is, however, done only in very special circumstances of difficulties or impasse in the community or family where the dead person once lived, for example, when someone of the family or community is not making progress in his material life or when a child is not succeeding in his/her studies.

Source: [Plan Communal du Développement d'Awae](http://pndp.org/Plan-Communal-du-Développement-d'Awae.pdf), pndp.org (accessed: August 16, 2021).

Summary

This myth is a sequel to the myth of [Ngan-Medza](#), already in the DB. The tale of Ngan-Medza is the story of how the Bantou people of the Central Region of Cameroon crossed the river Yom (now called River Sanaga) on the back of a snake that served as a bridge. They fled from the Muslim onslaught led by Ousman Dan Fodio, who wanted to convert the animist Bantou people to Islam. According to the myth, this crossing, ordered by the Bantou ancestors, took place over several years. Each night a group would cross on the snake's back, holding a lit broom to guide their way.

The sequel to this myth, the Mysterious Staff of the Ngat people of Awae, begins when a young man, holding this lit broom, accidentally removes the burnt stems by stroking it on the snake's back, thinking it is was bare earth on which they were moving on. According to the ancestors' instructions (as explained in the [Ngan-Medza](#) myth in the DB), this totemic snake was never to be touched with a sharp object, fire, or anything that could hurt it. As a result of this accident, the snake went into the water with everybody on his back. Some died, and some swam to safety. The next group to cross was from another tribe, led by Manga. However, having submerged itself, the snake left them stranded in a forest next to the river, looking for a place to settle. As punishment for not being diligent, the gods asked them to go around the huge thick forest once a day for seven days. He said they would find a staff pinned to the ground on the seventh day, and the person who would succeed in removing it would be crowned Chief of the people.

When the group arrived at the scheduled location on the seventh round of the tedious forest walk, they found the mysterious staff. Several people made attempts to remove it from the ground but to no avail. Finally, a young man effortlessly pulled it from the ground, and under God's instructions, he became the Chief of the people. With the magical help of the mysterious staff, the newly crowned Chief could make the whole clan disappear, especially in times of external attacks from enemies. To this day, the Chief of the village of Ngat in Awae holds this Staff as a symbol of authority. They believe that God guides him to rule his people through the help of this Staff.

Analysis

Many world civilizations have symbols that denote authority, especially of the sovereignty of these places.

The custom of artefacts used as symbols of authority is widespread in traditional African societies in which staffs are the most common, used by clan, tribe or village heads. These staffs usually have mysterious origins or possess charms that help the chief, village or clan head apprehend and avert danger. A staff can also endow the ruler with wisdom to rule the people, and by it, he has the right to command traditional legal and administrative authority. Moreover, the staffs also indicate rightful authority in cases where leadership is unknown or disputed. In the case of the Staff of Ngat, the young man effortlessly pulled the staff from the ground much in the same way that only young

Arthur could have pulled Excalibur out of the rock.

The number seven, used in the myth, has a mythological and historical significance.

The myth underscores that the gods and ancestors rule over traditional societies and choose a leader for the people.

What they decree cannot be invalidated. The staff then serves as a link between the living and the ancestor/gods.

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

[Authority](#) [Identity](#) [Memory](#) [Nature](#) [Obedience](#) [Religious beliefs](#) [Respect](#)
[Society](#) [Tradition](#)

Further Reading

Balla Ndegué, Séraphin Guy, "[L'affaire des « serpents-totems » à Yaoundé: l'endroit et le verso](#)", *Religiologiques* 32 (2015): 93-121; religiologiques.uqam.ca (accessed: August 16, 2021).

Finnegan, Ruth, [Oral Literature in Africa](#), Open Book Publishers, 2016; online: library.oapen.org (accessed: August 16, 2021).

Addenda

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