Amshetu Melo Forchu, Jacqueline Atemkeng Fonge, "Entry on: The Snake and Mandere Big by Mama Asanatou", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1276. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Mama Asanatou

The Snake and Mandere Big

Cameroon

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	The Snake and Mandere Big
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Baba
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Cameroon
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	May 7, 2020
More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Yaoundé, Mfoundi, Central Cameroon
Genre	Folk tales, Myths
Target Audience	Crossover
Author of the Entry	Amshetu Melo Forchu, University of Yaoundé, meloamshetu@gmail.com Jacqueline Atemkeng Fonge, University of Yaoundé 1, fonjackie88@gmail.com
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Creators



Mama Asanatou (Storyteller)

Age of Narrator: 77 (in 2020)

Social status: Housewife, matriarch

Profession: Housewife

Languages of narration: Bamun, Baba

Bio prepared by Amshetu Melo Forchu, University of Yaoundé, meloamshetu@gmail.com

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating	Background of Ndefang-Pinying: Ndefang-Pinying constitutes one of the villages in Ngemba. Ngemba lies between Longitude 100 12’ and 100 47’ East of Greenwich Meridian and latitude 50 45’ and 60 18’ North or the Equator. Asobo Pius in “Mother Tongue Influence on English Language in Cameroon: A Case Study of the Pinyin Language” notes that the Pinyin people serve as universal sets of the Ngembas of the North west region and the Bamboutous of the Western region. Thus, the Pinyin language, accordingly shares some intelligibility with the Bamboutous Language because of family and trade links. Like most Ngemba people, they believe in God, divinities, spirits, ancestors and the practice of magic and medicine. For them, as it is the case with most Ngemba villages, there is nothing like natural death.

Summary

A long time ago, there was a big village near a big river. One day, the natives of this village noticed that a big snake would come out of the water to the land from time to time. And each time the snake came out, people would be terribly afraid and would hide in their homes. Later, this snake came right into the king’s dwelling and overthrew the king and became the king himself. Afterwards, the snake moved around the village in search of beautiful young girls as wives. Since the whole village was afraid, none of the girls’ parents could object to the advances of the big snake, hence, he took advantage of the situation and got married to all these girls.

In a neighbouring village, there were two young strong men named “Mandere Big” and “Mandere Small”. They would move from place to place burning down houses of the people who disobeyed their orders. The villages challenged them to confront the snake if they thought they were really the most powerful people in the village, and of course “Mandere Big” and “Mandere Small” took this seriously. They asked, “where is this village where the snake is ruling people?” They were immediately directed to the village where the snake lived. Upon their arrival, the snake realized that they were enemies even before they confronted him. When they finally came to see the snake and ask what he was doing in the king's palace, the snake asked: “ngorou-ngourou-ngourou*!!!” [who are you! Who are you! Who are you]. They responded: “we are “Mandere Big” and “Mandere Small”. The snake asked for the second time: “ngorou-ngourou-ngourou” [Who are you!

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Who are you! Who are you], and got the response: “I am ‘Mandere Big’. By then, ‘Mandere Small’ had escaped because he sensed danger.

However, the verbal exchange between “Mandere Big” and the snake continued. While the snake poured a slippery substance on “Mandere Big”, the latter was busy sharpening a small magic knife which was hidden between his fingers. The snake asked again three times:

“ngorou-ngourou-ngourou” [who are you! Who are you! Who are you!].

“ngorou-ngourou-ngourou” [who are you! Who are you! Who are you!].

“ngorou-ngourou-ngourou” [who are you! Who are you! Who are you!].

And Big Mandere responded three times:

I am Mandere Big, the first!

I am Mandere Big, the first!

I am Mandere Big, the first!

Hereafter, the snake began to swallow him and as he was getting inside the snake, he began to cut through the snake with the magic knife. After the snake completely swallowed Mandere Big, the man came out unscathed. The young girls that the snake forcefully married were liberated, thanks to Mandere Big. Out of gratitude, Mandere Big was made king of the village, and “Mandere Small” who escaped, became his servant and paid allegiance to him forever.

* Local Baba language.

Analysis

Most African societies in the past were plagued with terror and uncertainty because of the vulnerability and inability of the inhabitants to protect themselves from the constant rampages of monsters of various kinds. Some of these monsters appear in the form of a snake which terrorizes the people, and require individuals with extraordinary strength and courage to challenge them. Individuals who succeed in fighting and defeating these monsters are usually

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	associated with legendary achievements in conjunction with the role they played in liberating their people. Such is the case with Mandere big in the above myth. His bravery and wisdom in saving the entire village from the terrible snake rule are acknowledged and rewarded by the people. The myth therefore evokes the fact that bravery brings reward. This is justified by Mandere Big's rise to kingship in the other village after liberating the people from the monster. This again indicates that it takes courage, wisdom and a sense of responsibility and communality to become king. Meanwhile, people like Mandere Small who exhibit cowardice serve those in power as seen in the myth.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adversity Animals Conflict
Further Reading	Deme, Mariam Konate, "Heroism and the Supernatural in the African Epic: Toward a Critical Analysis", *Journal of Black Studies* 39.3 (2009): 402–419.
Addenda	Researcher: Amshetu Melo Forchu Assistant researcher: Seidou Melo (trans)

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