Amshetu Melo Forchu, Brindy Belinga Claude, "Entry on: Nchāmami by Mama Asanatou", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1279. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Mama Asanatou

Nchāmami

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	Nchāmami
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	June 7, 2020
More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Yaoundé, Mfoundi, Central Cameroon
Genre	Folk tales, Myths
Target Audience	Crossover
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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

The account of the myth of Nchāmami* goes thus: Nchāmami was the name of a river and at the same time the name of the invisible king of that river in Baba. Nchāmami separated the Baba village in two, and the people would usually put sticks across to serve as a bridge through which they crossed to the other section of the village to do farming. There came a time when Nchāmami gave conditions for the people to cross the river. First, he said the king of the Baba people had to offer sacrifices to him. These sacrifices included a certain number of cattle, food, and human beings. The latter accepted to give cattle and food, but not human beings, because he considered offering human beings an abomination in his land. Moreover, the gods would punish him if he ever does that. The second condition Nchāmami gave was that any person who had to come nearer it, must purify their hearts, and be free of all evil intentions, and not carry with them any mysterious and/or harmful concoctions. The third condition was that nobody would enter it at night.

The crossing over Nchāmami was a vital road for the people of Baba, and so the king had no option but to negotiate. One day the king gathered many of his notables and went to Nchāmami for a discussion. The latter issued an ultimatum in which the king had to accept within 24 hours to offer 15 people as sacrifices, before his people could cross over it. As usual the Baba king refused, and Nchāmami revealed to him that he had already claimed the 15 people (8 women, 7 men). To this revelation, the Baba king exclaimed “how did you do that”?

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Nchāmami said, “I already claimed the first 15 persons, who violated my second and third conditions stated above”, namely crossing over with evil intentions, and carrying mysterious concoctions, and crossing in the night. The king asked Nchāmami “can you show me which of my people you have already taken?”. Nchāmami performed a magical action and 15 people appeared physically. The king and his notables were abashed, and asked if they could negotiate. Nchāmami said “No! It was too late for them to come back physically”. Finally, the king and his notables acquiesced, fulfilled the remaining condition (i.e. cattle and food), and people began to cross the river (Nchāmami) normally.

* This is the name of a river, and at the same time the name of the invisible king of that river, in Baba language.

Analysis

The peaceful settlements of many tribes in some parts of Cameroon today take their roots from the arrangements they made with the gods and spiritual beings on the land. In dire need of either protection or important services, the people had to accept the conditions given by the deities or negotiate to lighten the burden levied on them. This is the case with the above myth where the king had to negotiate with Nchāmami for the people to cross over its river.

Furthermore, this myth brings up an important aspect when dealing with gods – sacrifices. One of the ways used by people in the Cameroon society to show their reverence and gratefulness to a god or to appease him, was sacrifices. These sacrifices could be done on the request of the gods or voluntarily. In case a god is angry, he could equally decide to impose sacrifices forcefully without the people’s approval as Nchāmami in the above myth did. These sacrifices could be food items, animals or human beings.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Disobedience Sacrifice
Further Reading	Gufler, Hermann J., "Reenactment of a Myth. The Fon of Oku Visits Lake Mawɛs (Cameroon)", *Anthropos* 104.2 (2009): 347–357 (accessed: April 26, 2021). Molenaar, Jan Willem and José C. M. Van Santen, "Perceptions of Water in a Changing Hydrological and Ecological Context: The Case of the Logone Flood Plains in Cameroon", *The Geographical Journal* 172.4 (2006): 331–347 (accessed: April 26, 2021).
Addenda	Researcher: Amshetu Melo Forchu

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