Amshetu Melo Forchu, Dorcace Makodjou Poka, "Entry on: Njeundem by Mama Asanatou", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke and Susan Deacy. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1314. Entry version as of October 30, 2026.

Mama Asanatou

Njeundem

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	Njeundem
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Bamun
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Cameroon
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	May 21, 2020
More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Yaoundé, Mfoundi, Central Cameroon
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover
Author of the Entry	Amshetu Melo Forchu, University of Yaoundé, meloamshetu@gmail.com Dorcace Makodjou Poka, University of Yaoundé 1, dorcacepoka@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

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

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

Cultural Background*: Bamoun (Foumban)

The Bamoun Kingdom is situated in the Western region of Cameroon. It is surrounded by Donga Mantung and Bui Divisions in the North, Mifi Division in the West, Bafia and Bangante towns in the South and Banyo town in the East. Its origin dates back to 1390 with its founder Nchare, a prince from Rifum (the present day Bankim), in the Adamawa Region of Cameroon (see here, accessed: July 9, 2019). The Foumban traditional society is well structured with "Mfon" (King) at the head, closely assisted by the "Momamfon" the queen. Other custodians of culture include the notables. The Mfon is noted for his numerous wives and uncountable children. Other secret societies which assist in the administration of the Kingdom, both in the physical and spiritual realms, include the secret societies. Among them are: Nguri and Muitngu secret societies. Owing to the people attachments to the Gods, spirits and ancestors, the Foumban people pay particular attention the popular Nguon Festival (of fertility and protection), which has become a crowd pulling event in Cameroon for the past years. Gods and ancestors are worshiped during the festival and the spirit of sharing encouraged among the people by the king. The Foumban kingdom is one of the oldest Kingdom in Africa and noted for the invention of their own form of writing, which was later pushed to the periphery.

* Sources:

Mamadou, Ntiecheles, L*es conflicts Socio-politique dans le Royaume Bamoun de 1863–1889*, DIPESS II Dissertation, University of Yaoundé 1, 2000.

Fewoh, Paul Mouliom, *Collectives Décentralisée et Developpement Local: le Cas de la Commune Ubaine de Foumban*, DIPESS II Dissertation, University of Yaoundé, 2006.

Summary

In a very distant past, a certain man who owned a very big farm lived in a certain village in the Bamun kingdom and wild animals would

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

often come from a nearby bush to devour his crops. He had two sons; one was very aggressive and rude and the other one was very humble and kind. He also owned two spears which he bequeathed to these two sons before he died. The man told his sons that these spears were the only weapons to use to fight the intruding animals. The spears were specifically marked so that the two sons knew which belonged to which. On one fateful day, the animals came down to the farm again, and the attention of the sons was sought as the entire village began to shout at these animals. In a hurry, the son who was very humble and kind rushed to the house and mistakenly took the spear that belonged to the half-brother, the other son. He ran after the animals, and speared one of them. The impact was so strong that the spear penetrated the body of the beast, and the animal escaped with the spear still attached. This spear belonged to the half-brother, the aggressive and rude son.

When the aggressive and rude son noticed that it was his spear that had been used to chase away the animal, he immediately approached his sibling to ask for his spear. For the sake of peace, the humble and kind son offered to give him his own spear, but the aggressive and rude son refused. Besides, all attempts to beg the aggressive son accept the other spear went in vain. Later on, he began to threaten his kind brother's life. Thereon, an old man appeared from nowhere and told the humble and kind son where the animal went with the spear. The old man told him that the animal he shut was called “Njeundem*” and that the animals are men from the sky who transformed into animals and come to earth to feed themselves on human crops. The old man then instructed him on how he could get to the house of Njeundem, which is in the sky, and how he would obtain the spear.

Thereafter, the humble and kind son set out for the journey, and the first person he saw on his way was a woman fetching water with her head and legs. The boy asked, “Mother, do you know the road to Njeundem’s house”? She replied, “Come and help me fetch water with your head and legs, and I will show you the way to Njeundem’s compound”. The boy did all the woman asked and she showed him the way. She told him that there are three roads ahead, one on the left, one on the right, and the other in the middle. However, she instructed the boy to take the middle road.

The humble and kind boy followed her instructions until he found another woman farming with her head and buttocks. The boy asked: “Mother, where is the road to Njeundem’s house”. She replied, “If you

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of “Artes Liberales” of the University of Warsaw.

help me to farm with your head and buttocks, I will show you the way to Njeundem's house". The boy did as she requested, and the woman showed him the way.

Likewise, she told the boy that he would see three roads on his way, on the left, middle and right, and that he should take the one in the middle. The boy did exactly that, and likewise, he met another old woman, this time the woman was older than the previous ones. The old woman said to the boy: "My son, my son, come and help me look for firewood, fetch water, bathe me and prepare food for me". She was speaking with difficulty and in a very low tone. The humble and kind boy asked: "Mama, where will I get a calabash to fetch water for you?" However, the old woman did not respond and when the boy began to fetch firewood around, a task that was much easier to accomplish, the old woman intervened and said; "Stop! Stop! Stop!". Consequently, the boy stopped and the woman gave him directions on how to proceed with his journey to Njeundem's house. The boy had to traverse three hills and three valleys and when had got to the third valley, he had to begin to cry and sing:

"Oh Njeundem; I am coming to see Njeundem"

"Oh Njeundem; I am coming to see Njeundem"

"Oh Njeundem; I am coming to see Njeundem"

"Oh Njeundem; why did you leave me on earth"

"Oh Njeundem; why did you leave me on earth"

She told the boy that when he got there he must make sure that he returned the same day because Njeundem's son is expected to visit him on that day since Njeundem was now very frail and weak because of the wounds he sustained from the spear. Njeundem had willed that when he died the spear should be given to this son who lives on earth. However, if this humble and kind boy spent the night there, Njeundem's son may meet him, and the people of that world would immediately recognize that he was not Njeundem' son, and they would kill him.

The humble and kind boy got to the sky where Njeundem lived, did as the old woman instructed, and the people of the sky all came out to comfort him, thinking that he was the son of Njeundem who had come

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

to see his dying father. When he arrived, Njeundem had died, and they handed the spear to the boy according to his will, and gave him food and palm nuts. He ate the food and went back to earth with the nuts. On his way back, he did not see any of the women who had helped him on his way to Njeundem.

When he returned, he gave the spear to his sibling (the rude and aggressive son). He also roasted the palm nuts that had been offered to him by the people in the sky, ate one, and kept two. When the aggressive and rude sibling came in, he could not withstand the tantalizing aroma of the nuts, and immediately, he took them and ate. When the humble and kind brother came back, he could not find the two nuts. Upon investigation, he realized that his sibling had eaten them. Just like his rude and aggressive sibling, he demanded that he must return his two original nuts. The argument went bitter, and the rude boy undertook his own journey to Njeundem's house, to get the same species of palm nuts. On his way, he met the three women that his sibling had met earlier and helped. Unlike his humble and kind brother, he refused to help any of the women, hence, he did not follow any of the instructions that his half-brother had obeyed. When he finally got to Njeundem's house, the people of the sky came out and beat him to death.

* This literally means "the people who live in the house of god," in the local language of Bamun.

Analysis

The issue of sacred animals which is prominent in the Bamun belief system is greatly illustrated in this myth. These sacred animals represent people from the world beyond and who usually come down to earth to feed themselves. This is clearly seen in this myth through Njeundem, which literally means "people who live in the house of God", in the Bamun language. At the beginning of the myth we are exposed to two brothers who have different characteristics: one is kind and the other aggressive. In the myth, as well as in our traditional African culture, good habits are rewarded while bad ones are condemned just as the kind son is rewarded and the aggressive one is killed. This goes on to show the value that African culture attaches to good habits which children must develop — habits

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

	exemplified here in the ability to cater for an elderly person, and to show compassion towards one another. More so, the myth of Njeundem teaches us a moral lesson which is the negative effect of wrong-doing. The myth of Njeundem helps to highlight the importance that African culture attaches to good habits or virtue like kindness and obedience, thus calling on individuals to cultivate them. Finally, the myth of Njeundem also helps us to understand a central practice in most traditional African societies, namely worship of sacred animals.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Character traits Journeys Siblings Values
Further Reading	Omara, Tom, “The Exodus” in *Short East African Plays in English*, David Cook & Miles Lee, eds. London: HEB, 1968, 46–66.
Addenda	Researchers: Amshetu Melo Forchu and Dorcace Makodjou Poka

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of “Artes Liberales” of the University of Warsaw.