Eleanor A. Dasi, "Entry on: The Missing Calabash by Olajire Olanlokun", peer-reviewed by Divine Che Neba, 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/1344. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Olajire Olanlokun

The Missing Calabash

Nigeria (1991)

TAGS: African Traditions



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

General information	
Title of the work	The Missing Calabash
Country of the First Edition	Nigeria
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English with some words in Yoruba
First Edition Date	1991
First Edition Details	Olajire Olanlokun, *The Missing Calabash*. Lagos: Parrot and Pen Enterprises, 1991, 27 pp.
ISBN	9780435892470
Genre	Fiction, Short stories
Target Audience	Children
Author of the Entry	Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaounde I, wandasi5@yahoo.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Divine Che Neba, University of Yaounde 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaounde 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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



Olajire Olanlokun , 1944 - 2006
(Author)

He was born in Okemesi, Ekiti Nigeria on September 24, 1944. He attended two Nigerian Universities: Ibadan and Lagos. The first gave him a postgraduate diploma in librarianship in 1973 while the second gave him a degree in history in 1980. He continued to the University of Pittsburgh in the USA where he specialised in Library. He is noted for children's fiction such as *Little Joe*, *Femi and his Dog*, *City Boy*, and *Second to None*. As concerns recognitions, he was awarded The Federal Government Scholar (1981-82), Association of Nigerian Authors and the NNMC Literary Prize for Children's Books in 1991. He has written over 30 books in all. Some of his other titles are: *Children of the Valley* (1992), *Mammy Water and Other Stories* (1993), *The King's Daughter* (1994), *The Dishonest Servant* (2002), and *The Strange Bird* (2006). He died in March, 2006, while still serving as librarian in the University of Lagos.

Sources:

memory-of.com (accessed: 28 August 2020).

Biography at Booknook.store (accessed: August 31, 2021).

Bio prepared by Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaounde I, wandasi5@yahoo.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

Summary

Barely after the coronation of Adekambi, the new and promising king of Opela, the village experiences panic as a result of the absence of one the symbols of royalty, the calabash. Chief Koya, one of the elders of Idofin Council, out of greed and bad faith, steals the calabash. With the disappearance of the calabash, the new king can no longer rule effectively and the whole royal family is depressed. While the calabash is in the custody of Chief Koya, he finds neither peace nor sleep as it constantly sings of its displacement in the night. Due to this singing of the calabash, he decides to take it out of his house. So, Chief Koya hides the calabash under his garment and transports it to one of his houses in the neighbouring village of Idowa where he buries it. The following day, he returns to Opela. Back in Idowa, the tenants in his house are unable to sleep due to an owl that hoots every night. Even in Opela, Chief Koya is unable to sleep because the singing from the distant calabash becomes louder and persistent every midnight. The next day he decides to pay the King a visit in order to find out the plans of the miserable King. As Chief Koya visits the palace to console the unhappy King, he is informed of a divine revelation about the theft of the calabash. It is revealed that the criminal is a close relative and an elder of the land. He then decides to take it back to the palace. He goes back to Idowa, removes the calabash from where he had buried it and hides it under his garment. On his way to Opela, the calabash becomes hotter, larger, heavier, and the voice grows louder under his garment. Despite the weight and burden meted out on him by the mysterious calabash, he struggles to get to the palace, and although under excruciating pain, he has to wait for a suitable opportunity to return the calabash to its position. As Chief Koya secretly keeps the calabash in its sacred position and is about to leave, the King's eldest son, Oyewole, who had decided to exert more energy in the search for the missing calabash, catches him and yells as the Chief struggles to run. Chief Okoya is caught and banished from the community.

Analysis

Royalty, authority, royal objects with a dash of mysticism are the components of some myths told among the African people. These royal objects include the stool, the staff and the hat amongst others. Olajire Olanlokun's *The Missing Calabash*, told as a children's story, recounts the loss, search and recovery of a magical royal object, the calabash. Its absence limits the authority of the royal house and halts the

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.

development of the community of Opela. The idea of loss, search and restoration of sacred objects is peculiar to folktales and usually combines both reward and punishment. While Chief Koya is punished for stealing the royal calabash and exposing his community to danger, Oyewole, the king's son is applauded for apprehending the thief and restoring stability in the land. This system of reward and punishment go a long way to establish both personal and community peace.

Also, the missing items in most world mythologies usually have a supernatural undertone. The personified calabash is given a voice to sing which disturbs the sleep of the culprit, Chief Koya. This royal item also has the ability to communicate with other nocturnal creatures such as the owl and will not find rest until they are returned to their sacred habitat.

In as much as the story is a moral fable on guilt, it also calls for the preservation of sacred royal object threatened by external forces, be it imposters or the greedy. These sacred royal symbols are imbued with mystical powers and essence enhancing the authority of the royal household. Their absence does not only limit the powers of the king by curtailing the ancestral connection but hinders progress in the land.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Traditions
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Authority Magic powers Punishment Tradition

Further Reading

Nabofa, Michael Y., *Symbolism in African Traditional Religion,* Ibadan: Paperback Publishers, 1994.

Okafor, R.C. and L. N. Emeka, *Nigerian Peoples and Culture*, Millennium Edition, Enugu: New Generation Books, 2002.

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.

Addenda

Cover and selected pages available at Google Books.

The entry is based on: Olanlokun, Olajire, *The Missing Calabash*, ill. by Mel Todd, Oxford: Heinemann, 1997, 59 pp.

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.