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Edmund Sama Titanji

The Origin of the Voma Cult in Bali Nyonga

Cameroon

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Gods





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

General information	
Title of the work	The Origin of the Voma Cult in Bali Nyonga
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Mungaka
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Cameroon
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	August 23, 2017
More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Bali Nyonga in the North-West region of Cameroon
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover (Young adults + adults)
Author of the Entry	Divine Che Neba, University of Yaoundé 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com
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Creators



Edmund Sama Titanji (Storyteller)

Social status: Quarter Head

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Language of narration: Mungaka

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

Cultural Background*: Bali Nyonga is a part of the larger Bali Chamba groups found in Cameroon and Nigeria. The account that the Bali Nyongas give of themselves is that they came from the Niger on horseback, attacking and defeating other tribes along their path until they finally settled in their present site. This is probably why they are known by their neighbours (particularly Mankon, Pinyin, Meta, Bafut, Moghamo, who have been victims of their aggression) as a warlike and aggressive group. Their language, Mungaka, gained prestige during the colonial days as it was used by missionaries for communication and education. Like any other cultural group in the North West Region of Cameroon, the Bali people pray to God through their ancestors. They have a rich cultural heritage which they manifest each year through the Lela Festival.

Occasion: Staged performance.

* Source:

Ato Bob, *The Bali Nyonga of Cameroon, a story of African Migration*, mediablackberry.com (accessed: June 19, 2019).

Summary

A long time ago, in the land of Bali Nyonga, situated in the North-West Region of Cameroon, lamentations echoed throughout the village. The community was struck with unusual happenings: mothers lost their babies, wives lost their husbands, people went to the farms and never returned, the land was barren and so produced little or no crops, the villagers cried out to their fon for help because they could not stand the suffering they were undergoing. The Fon sent his 'Nchindas*' to go round the village and investigate the cause of the lamentation and was very hurt to learn about his subjects' sufferings.

Early one morning, he asked his town crier to announce to the entire village that all the soothsayers and witch doctors were needed at the palace. After all their efforts to cleanse the land, things were getting worse. The chief priest of the clan could not do anything to help the villagers and so was the case of the others. Human sacrifices were

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made where virgins were sacrificed to cleanse the land, the little yield that the people harvested were given to the "mouth piece" of the gods to appease them, but all these efforts were in vain. The Fon was so sad because he could not help solve his subjects' problems. One evening, a heavy storm seized the whole clan. A very loud noise was heard as if something dropped down from the sky. It was a man who could speak their language clearly but they could not trace his lineage.

He asked for directions to the Fon's palace and told him he could cleanse the land. He said after the Bali-Widikum battle, during which the Bali people seized the land of the Widikum people and occupied it, the people cursed the Bali people. Again, the gods were angry because they had been neglected. He concluded by saying that a strong spell had been cast upon the land and unless the land is properly cleansed, the hardship would not end. He said they had to look for a supernatural force to always guide them. He went to the stream where the traditional dance festival rituals are being carried out today and performed some sacrifices with some incantations strange to everyone. The villagers were asked to stay in their homes from sunset and not to open their doors to any stranger.

They were also to put out all their torch-lights. It is said that the man wrestled with the spirits in order to achieve his goals and also made a pact with the marine gods. That is one of the reasons why the Bali people always do their sacrifices in the water because they believe their ancestors and gods are under the water. Ba–Njingum, the man who came from the sky in a thunderstorm, transformed into a spirit, prepared his charms, walked round the village and cleansed the land. It took him one week before he completed the task assigned to him by the gods.

In his spiritual realm, and to prevent future calamities, he created a permanent sacred cult called 'Voma'. He later initiated some elders into this sacred cult to help him carry out the spiritual activities in the village. Two types of 'Voma' cult can be identified among the Bali Nyonga people: the upper Voma and the lower Voma. The lower Voma accepts all males but the upper Voma is specifically reserved for higher priests and the initiated. The sacred cult has a function to purify and protect the society. The 'Voma' sacred society is headed by the Njingum's lineage in Bali Nyonga, since their ancestor is not an ordinary human being. It is only his lineage that has the power and strength to carry out spiritual responsibilities for the village.

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* Nchinda is a royal page.

Analysis	Cultic literature is wide spread in Africa, partly because of some supernatural occurrences, which humans sometimes find difficult to give immediate or convincing responses to. Caught in such webs, humanity has resorted to the supernatural through incantations, invocations, hymns, oracles, prayers or other forms of worship, to clear such doubts. Repeated rituals and incantations have proven that one of the access points to the world beyond is creating permanent cults so as to facilitate the transmission of such religious and traditional values from one generation to the other. Similar experiences account for the origin of the Voma cult, which till date, is an asset to the Bali Nyonga people of the North West Region of Cameroon, as it helps in the transmission of the people's mythic imagination and other traditional values from one generation to the other. Other world mythologies are replete with similar instances of ancestors, religious leaders, prophets, outcasts falling from heaven and/or the sky to either indicate places of worship, dispatch special messages to humanity or serve a turn of punishment.
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	Adversity Hierarchy Humanity Religious beliefs Sacrifice Society Transformation Water
Further Reading	Bowden, Hugh, *Mystery Cults of the Ancient World,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.

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Burkert, Walter, *Ancient Mystery Cults,* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987.

Doumbia, Amama and Naomi Doumbia, *The Way of the Elders: West African Spirituality and Tradition,* St Paul MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2004.

Mbiti, Samuel John, *African Religion and Philosophy,* Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1969.

Addenda

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Research Assistant and Translator: Juliet Achu Bobimwuh.

Editor: Eleanor A. Dasi.

Method of data collection: Tape recording and note-taking.

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