El Hadj Awal

Mitidi – the Snake-man

Cameroon

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions





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General information	
Title of the work	Mitidi – the Snake-man
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Hausa (Hau)
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Cameroon
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More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Central Mosque, Tsinga Yaounde
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover
Author of the Entry	Divine Che Neba, University of Yaounde 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaounde 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaounde 1, wandasi5@yahoo.com Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com

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Creators



El Hadj Awal (Storyteller)

Age of narrator: 62 (in 2017)

Social status: Imam

Profession: Business man

Language of narration: Hausa (Hau)

Bio prepared by Divine Che Neba, University of Yaounde 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

Background: The Hausa population of Cameroon are mostly found in the Grand North (Adamawa, North, and Far North) between Latitude 80 34' 51.2436" North and Longitude 130 54' 51.8364" East. They are dotted all over the country, because of their migratory nature. They constitute one of the marginalized groups in the country, partly because many are not educated, especially their women. The Hausa people of Cameroon are part of the Sub-Saharan African Hausa community. They speak Hausa (Hau), practice Islam, and belief in festivals like the Cock Festival (the nephew of the successor of a family throws a cock in a fire with the belief that should it fall on the right of the fire, bountiful blessings will be poured on the family, but should it fall on the left side of the fire, bad luck will come upon the family) and the Lam (a ceremony that is performed to show off young girls who are ripe for marriage). Conversely, amongst these people are specialists (Malams, Hausa priests) who perform different rituals and sacrifices, and blend different magical formulas to cure different diseases that plague individuals, families and the community (see here, accessed: January 7, 2018).

Occasion: staged

Summary

A long time ago, in a distant dark kingdom in the depths of the earth, there lived a being who could transform into both man and snake. He reigned alone very far from the light of the sun and was considered as the master of the Underworld. Meanwhile, there lived and reigned a king on earth who was well-respected for his sense of responsibility, equity and justice. This earthly king was married to three wives and had a lone daughter, a girl who was quite remarkable for her matchless beauty. In the king's court, there was also a shepherd called Madi, who was also greatly loved by the king for his skills and many good qualities. So, the king decided to marry off his daughter to this shepherd despite the fact that he had a physical disability – he had an amputated arm. When he was introduced to the daughter, she rejected him because of his disability.

Having heard the news about the intentions of the king to find a husband worthy of his daughter, Mitidi, the snake-man, decided to leave his dark realm for the first time and presented himself in front of

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the king in a magnificent human form. With a very imposing build, and an appearance of a great Hausa warrior, he stood in front of the king and claimed that he descended from a great Hausa royal lineage.

Upon seeing this man, the princess immediately named him as the chosen one for her heart. So, the king gave in to the will of the girl and gave his blessings, as all fathers will do. The couple took an oath of no-return. After the marriage ceremony, the couple was accompanied by a large bridal procession to the direction of their new home. But midway, Mitidi asked them to return to their land and allow him and his wife to continue the journey by themselves. After a long walk, they arrived at the entrance of a dark fortress. That is how he took his wife into his dark suffocating kingdom and, for the first time, showed her his real face. The princess was shocked, and plunged into great fear and immense sadness.

The snake-man created an impossible world that dazzled her, thus rendering her prisoner of her own selfishness, pride and avarice. She was thus condemned to live, and sometimes fight, with other snakes for the rest of her life, and was late transformed into a snake woman. She became the queen of the world of darkness against her will.

Analysis

The transformation of people into beasts, or generally what is called shape shifting, is often seen as a form of punishment or retributive justice for vices indulged in by individuals. Some societies see shape shifting as a leeway to liberating the society from external impediments, as the new shape serves as a catalyst for breakthrough, or a means of having access into the impenetrable. Pride and avarice, as the above myth records, delivers the heroine, first, into the hands of a snake man, and later, her transformation into a snake-woman serves as retribution for her pride and vanity. Besides the heroine, Mitidi (the snake man) transforms into a human being as a means of having access into a world that does not belong to him. The unleashing of his wicked plans on the heroine serves as a whip of the Gods, spirits and ancestors because of her deviant behavior. This phenomenon of therianthropy (human-animal transformation and vice versa) is recurrent in many world mythologies.

Classical, Mythological, African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions

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Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Further Reading

Hall, Jamie, *Half Human, Half Animal: Tales of Werewolves Related Creatures*, Bloomington, Indiana: Authorhouse, 2003.

Addenda

Method of data collection: Tape recording and note taking.

Researcher: Divine Che Neba.

Assistant researcher: Djibril Saibou.

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