Eleanor A. Dasi, "Entry on: The Loss of The Fong Totem by Eto'o ", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke, Divine Che Neba, Elizabeth Hale and Karolina Anna Kulpa. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/909. Entry version as of October 31, 2026.

Eto'o

The Loss of The Fong Totem

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	The Loss of The Fong Totem
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Bulu
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Cameroon
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	July 12, 2019
More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Ngozazip
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover
Author of the Entry	Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaoundé 1, wandasi5@yahoo.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com Divine Che Neba, University of Yaoundé 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au Karolina Anna Kulpa, University of Warsaw, k.kulpa@al.uw.edu.pl

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



Eto'o (Storyteller)

Age of narrator: 54 (in 2019)

Social status: village head

Profession: farming

Language of narration: Bulu

Bio prepared by Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaoundé 1, 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

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

Cultural Background*: The Bulu people originated from Bantu tribe and are located in Cameroon, Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tome. Those in Cameroon are mostly found in the South Region specifically around Ebolowa and Sangmelima. They belong to the general Beti ethnic group and languages with whom they share a common history, ancestry and origin. A mythic legend amongst the Beti reports that the Beti came from the other side of the River Sanaga. They finally crossed the river at the end of the eighteenth century on the back of a snake called Ngan-Medza. They fled Ousman dan Fodio, a Muslim leader from the region of Adamawa in the north of the country, who decided to Islamize all animist peoples at the time in Cameroon. Though Christianity has almost dominated their religious beliefs, they still have some cultural religious values that they hold on to.

Occasion: Staged

*Source: *Bulu*, britannica.com (accessed: November 18, 2019).

Summary

A long time ago, Fong, a village in the Beti clan was constantly haunted by epidemics, which caused the mysterious deaths of loved ones and the destruction of culture. This situation forced the people to look for ways through which they could protect themselves from these attacks. So, some elders of the village took advantage of the presence of a young pregnant woman in the village and initiated her unborn baby, so that he could serve as their protector after birth. The baby was finally born, but after a year, it was noticed that he could neither sit upright nor walk on his own. So the villagers suggested the baby should be kept by the river side for the gods to heal him. This was done and when the villagers went to check if the baby had received the miraculous healing, they were shocked to notice that he had turned into a big black snake with a short tail. The snake baby, named Etun Okot, was considered as the protector of the land. The news of the snake protector was received in the village with much euphoria for it was believed that its presence was going to bring joy to the entire clan.

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.

In order for the protector to work effectively, it was forbidden to stare at him directly in the eyes. All the streets were also expected to be kept clean all the time because the snake never felt comfortable in a dirty environment. Also, children were not allowed to pass anywhere near him for fear of being slammed with a curse. The society lived in total harmony with Etun Okot, until the passing away of the first generation. Things began to fall apart when the generation that took over started trampling on Etun Okot's interdictions to the people. In order to manifest his dissatisfaction with the villagers' attitude towards him, the black snake, instead of defending his people as always, instead started stinging everybody that came his way. To Etun, this was the only way he could call the villagers back to order. But still, the villagers paid little or no attention to Okot's threats and rather intensified their lack of consideration for him. This fighting between the protector and the people persisted for a long time until one day when one of Etun Okot's kind was killed by a human. As a result, it got very angry and injected its deadly venom on a villager, leaving him dead. After that day, Etun Okot stopped being the clan's protector and disappeared into nature, leaving the clan vulnerable to attacks once more. Again since then, whenever a member of the Fong clan eats snake meat, he gets serious attacks of various illnesses. This explains why since then, the Fong people do not eat snakes, most especially the black snake.

Analysis

Myths in Africa, like elsewhere, treat issues related to the consequences of disobeying their god(s), deities and/or totems. This disobedience usually results in punishment and/or separation of the divine forces from humans. The above myth is one such example wherein the people of Fong lose protection from their totem because of negligence and disobedience.

Furthermore, the myth underscores the idea that the gods, since ancient times, could turn humans into animals for various purposes. In the above myth, the transformation of the child into a serpent is a response to the problem of insecurity that plagued the land. But his disobedience forces the totem Etun Okot to withdraw its protective power over people.

The image of the snake is used in some world mythologies as a dual figure, representing good and evil. This situation is illustrated in the above myth wherein the snake begins as protector and ends up being

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.

vengeful and vindictive.

However, humans have also sought to be in good terms with the gods and that is why, the people of Fong, after realising their error, decided to continue attributing the status of a totem to the snake by not eating it.

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 Death Disobedience Religious beliefs Revenge

Further Reading

Deane, John, *Bathurst Worship of the Serpent: Traced Throughout the World*, London: Gilbert and Rivington Printers, 1833.

Edwards, Eric, "Totemism Revisited: An essay on the meaning, origin, history and mythology of totemism and totemistic society from prehistoric times to its survivals in modern folklore", available at ericwedwards.wordpress.com (accessed: November 18, 2019).

Henderson, Joseph Lewis and Maud Oakes, *The Wisdom of the Serpent*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

Addenda

Method of data collection: Tape recording and note taking

Researcher: Eleanor A. Dasi

Assistant researcher/translator: Ngona Ada Martine Gina

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.

Eleanor A. Dasi, "Entry on: The Loss of The Fong Totem by Eto'o ", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke, Divine Che Neba, Elizabeth Hale and Karolina Anna Kulpa. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/909. Entry version as of October 31, 2026.

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.