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Mado Pauline Tcheutchoua

The Myth of “Nkentatet” (ŋĸØ’ta’tét)

Cameroon

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Gods





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

General information	
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Creators



Mado Pauline Tcheutchoua (Storyteller)

Age of narrator: 59 (in 2019)

Profession: Farmer

Language of narration: French

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Additional information

Summary

Nkentatet (ŋĸØ’ta’tét) is a sacred worship place located in the Bamendjou-Bamenka-Bansoa* border where three great rivers meet and form a waterfall at a confluence. The Nkentatet (ŋĸØ’ta’tét) sacred place is also the name of this small river. The myth goes thus: in the distant past, Nkentatet (ŋĸØ’ta’tét) was surrounded by Baobab trees and rocks, all in a small isolated forest. When God decided to create the Bamendjou-Bamenka-Bansoa people, He came down to settle in this isolated small forest, so that he could better do his work without disturbance and distraction. It was also necessary for Him to come down to create these people and their land because He needed time to guide them after creating them. When He had finished creating the people and their beautiful land, full of fruits and animals, the traditional chiefs of the Bamendjou-Bamenka-Bansoa chiefdoms and their entourage were very happy, but had no clue about the sacredness of “Nkentatet” (ŋĸØ’ta’tét), and the fact that it was God’s “dwelling place” to which special sacrifices and rituals had to be done annually. Moreover, God realized that the people were now indulging in evil practices such as idol worship—worshipping skulls of their ancestors and performing other traditional rites like LAH’KAM**—choosing an heir to the throne when a chief *disappears****, by performing certain routine traditional practices.

Consequently, God decided to punish them. Many years later, the natives of this land started witnessing atrocities in multiple facades. It all started with a newly crowned notable who left the palace shortly after being crowned to settle in the neighbourhood of Nkentatet (ŋĸØ’ta’tét). His new house collapsed barely six months after he was crowned. This happened when they were all in the palace for an annual festival. This was followed by the collapse of other houses built in the village. As if that was not enough, each time pregnant women crossed these three great rivers, they would slip and fall in the water and when the others gave birth their children would die. The natives bemoaned these unfortunate incidents. While some accused the custodians of tradition for being disloyal to the Gods, others pointed accusing fingers to some chiefs for defying traditional norms. No one was sure of anything! Behold one day a soothsayer from a neighbouring village revealed that the origin of the problem was due to the anger of the Gods, who were living in a river bordering the three villages. He said these Gods needed a sacrifice from the chiefs

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of the land as a sign of repentance and consecration, before this problem could be solved.

The chief of each village immediately summoned the custodians of tradition for the sacrifice to be done as directed by the soothsayer. They went to this river crossing (i.e. Nkentatet (ŋĸØ’ta’tét) bringing with them palm oil, palm wine, salt, kola nut, a goat, and *jujube***** for the sacrifice. Once the rites were performed, everything changed and nothing horrendous ever happened there again. The villagers then concluded that God was hidden at the place, and in order to honour this sacred place, they named the first river as the God of Bamendjou, the second river as the God of Bamenka and the third river as the God of Bansoa. The confluence, where these three rivers meet is today considered as the union of the three villages that symbolises strength, hence the famous saying among these people in the local language states that: “*nkwicho mbié ndo mbié nga la*” which means union brings peace and banishes curses, witches and wizards from the land. Since then, this place became a great sacred place, a place that brings lasting solutions to the problems of the Bamendjou, Bansoa and Bamenka people.

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* Bamendjou-Bamenka are found in the Upper Plateau Division of the Western region of Cameroon and Bansoa is found in the Menoua Division of the same region.

** This is a powerful sacred society in this area even till today.

*** According to the traditional beliefs of the Bamendjou-Bamenka-Bansoa people, a chief never dies, he only disappears.

**** This is a name of a certain traditional fruits found in these villages, which are carried along to offer sacrifices to the Gods. We were unable to established a scientific name for this fruits, because the villages are not allowed to show this fruits to strangers.

Analysis

The myth of Nkentatet is an important creation myth which according to *A Dictionary of Creation Myths* by Leeming and Leeming*, etiologically uses symbolic narratives to account for the origins of

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certain recognizable rites, places and sacred objects (viii). This myth explains both the origin of the Bamendjou-Bamenka-Bansoa people as well as the reason for the Nkentatet (ŋĸØ’ta’tét) sacred worship. During special cultural events as well as at home, this myth with its few variants is told to children and young adults in order to preserve cultural or collective memory and maintain the cultural identity of the Nkentatet people. Although, the syntax might change depending on the teller and the occasion, the structure remains the same.

The universal or archetypal pattern that is also highlighted in this myth is the early man’s conscious or unconscious offense of the creator and its consequences.

It explains not only the origin of the Bamendjou Cosmos but also the origin of their awareness of the world. As a symbolic narrative, the fantastical calamities that befall the tribes’ women and children prior to the discovery of their supreme deity can be linked to the oneiric and unconscious material that constitute these preconscious processes. This process then enables the people to move from an archaic identity (Jung) to a cultural identity.

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

Names Nature Punishment Religious beliefs Sacrifice Water

Further Reading

Leeming, David Adams and Margaret Adams Leeming, *A Dictionary of Creation Myths*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Von Franz, Marie-Louise, *Creation Myths (Rev. ed)*, Colorado: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1972. Google Books (accessed: March

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Addenda

Data collection method: Note-taking

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