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Saïdou Kitikil

# Myth of the Sacred Fish, “Mubala”, among the Giziga People

*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



**Saïdou Kitikil (Storyteller)**

Age of Narrator: 60 (in 2019)

Social status: Elite in the community

Profession: Ophthalmologist

Language of narration: Giziga

Bio prepared by Didymus Tsangue Douanla, University of Koblenz-Landau, douanlatsangue@gmail.com and Aïcha Saïd Larissa, University of Yaoundé 1, larissaichasaid@gmail.com



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## Additional information

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| Origin/Cultural Background/Dating | Cultural Background: See *Myth of the Creation of the Giziga People of Muturwa*. |

Summary

Mubala is a sacred fish in the Giziga land, which appears in several colours and it is revered among the Giziga people in the north of Cameroon. The myth states that at the beginning of time, when the Giziga people were migrating from Sudan toward Cameroon (specifically Maroua, where they are presently settled), they had no leader to guide them. They were moving away in search of fertile land for agriculture, water body for fishing and forest for hunting. One day when they arrived at a lake at the place known as Lere (a locality somewhere around the frontier between Chad and Cameroon), they decided to rest and get refreshment from the water. Suddenly, there were attacked by the indigenous people in the area, who saw them as intruders. And since it was their first experience at warfare, they had no clue of how to fight attackers, except for one young man named Gidang, who fought the enemy camp with the help of his brother and defeated the whole clan of attackers with his bare hands. Although he succeeded to rescue his people, he was seriously wounded by a poisoned weapon from the enemy camp. At this moment the gods of the clan of the Giziga people told him that he had a very short time to live. However, God promised him that because he had so bravely led and protected his people from the enemy He (God) would give him a second chance to lead his people even after his death. To fulfil this promise, God ask him to tell his people to throw is body into the lake when he died.

When he died, the people did as he had instructed, albeit not without several hesitations since he was much revered. His body was transformed into a fish called “Mubala”, several days after. According to instructions given by the late Gidang, the fish would jump out of the water as a sign that the people should leave the place. When this happened, they began their journey out of the place, by moving along the shore of the river. In the course of this journey, the fish would signal the direction to which they should go by regularly jumping out of the water to point to them the way forward. This journey continued until the people got to a land surface where crossing became an impossibility for “Mubala”, the fish. Unable to swim in the land, he



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asked God: “now that I am only a fish, how would I continue to lead my people in this journey through land?”. God replied that his reign had come to an end. He (God) instructed him (Mubala) to hand over leadership to his brother with whom he fought the enemy. According to the myth, “Mubala”, the fish, passed on this information by dragging down a fisherman into the water to give him this message, which he then transmitted to the people. He (Mubala) told the fisherman that if the people doubted him, they should dip his brother into water for a long time, and if he survived, they should know he was their chosen leader and should crown him “Buhy” (meaning the chief). From that time the sacred fish, “Mubala”, stayed in the water and never came back again.

To this day the Giziga people do not eat this particular fish, and it is believed that if anyone eats it by mistake, hair would grow from their mouth right to the intestine. This fish is well-known among the Giziga people and in the whole far north area of Cameroon. When strangers residing among the Giziga catch it, they remove the skin before eating it so as not to offend their Giziga neighbours.

Analysis

The story of the Gidang who fights and defeats a great army without any weaponry in the myth above has the element of the quest. In this community, as the teller explained, such myths are often told to children and young adults, in order to inspire courage and selfless service to the community. Such myths which have many variants depending on the occasion and the circumstances under which it is being recounted constitute an important part of the non-formal educational training that every young adult of the Gidang community must take besides the formal education offered by the government and other private providers. That is why although the teller is an ophthalmologist, he is still firmly rooted in this aspect of his upbringing.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Gods



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| Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture | Animals Character traits Heroism Nature Religious beliefs Transformation Water |
| Further Reading | Fomine, Forka Leypey Mathew, "Food Taboos in Precolonial and Contemporary Cameroon: A Historical Perspective", *Gastronomica* 9.4 (2009): 43–52 (accessed January 24, 2021). |
| Addenda | Researchers: Didymus Tsangue Douanla and Aïcha Sïaid Larissa (French translation)<br><br>Editor: Daniel A. Nkemleke (English translatlion) |



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