

Tale of Dates

Rootical Folklore

And there was the night we spoke of Paradise. Jah Folk put out the question, asking of content. If you could take a supply of one item, what would you take? Answers came in such as music, books, make-up, clothing and so on. He told us that if Kulang Toat was asked the same question, his answer would probably be dates. But before dates, he introduced Kulang.

You see, when we think of central characters in folk tales, we tend think of animals first, such as Mbe, tortoise of Igbo folktales; or Sungara, hare of Swahili stories; Anansi, spider of the Ashanti. But there are human figures also, such as Tere from the Banda of the Central African Republic; Yogbo from the Fon of Benin; and Kulang from the Nuer of South Sudan. They meander, throughout the moonlight stories. Kulang Toat was a historical personage, who became a leading presence, in Nuer oral traditions.

So, a trader comes from Dongola, to where Kulang resides in Fangak, carrying a large sack on his head. After off-loading, he offers Kulang a sample of his wares and he is hooked! From then on, all he thinks of, is Dongola. And here our local hero invited us to chant with him, so we chanted the name of the town, in traditional call and response.

Vision in his head,
Dongola.
Twenty four seven,
Dongola.
Whether by foot,
Dongola.
Or via camel,
Dongola.
He's got to go to,
Dongola.

Selling a cow, then transit with a group of traders, he makes the two month journey, to his kiss the ground destination. Once he steps into his Promised Land, he doesn't want to leave: dates everywhere! Jolted out of his reverie by the thought of his wife and children, he reluctantly leaves Salvation Street.

Jah Folk concluded, saying that in the oral traditions, as the aforementioned Anansi is credited with introducing – accidently - sorrel drink, so Kulang is seen as the pioneering figure, of date cultivation in South Sudan.

from *The Papine Tales*