

Map of Mythical Creatures of Africa

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Abstract:

Supernatural creatures have existed in all countries since the most ancient times. Most of them are believed to reside in particular countries, areas or landscape habitats. Many of primary sources of information about particular creatures (e.g., legends, tales, songs, anecdotes) contain geographic references that can be analysed geographically. We have demonstrated it with the Map of Mythical Creatures of Europe, published in 2013 (English version in 2020). The list of mythical creatures of the geographic territory of Africa contains 111 records. The geographical database has been compiled from 34 cumulative sources and verified against other published sources in several languages. The aim of the project was to once again demonstrate the possibility and advantages of a geographic approach in mythology and folklore studies.

The main tasks of the map project were (a) collecting reliable information of the most known mythical creatures in Africa into the database, following the same structure as the database for Europe, with possible extensions to include information about new types of creatures or their characteristic and (b) designing an attractive wall map based on collected data, preserving the style of the Map of Mythical Creatures of Europe but also making it different to reflect the specificity of African continent and (c) develop database structure and web services for provision of collected data, both for Europe and Africa, in form of interactive web maps.

Typology of mythical beings of Africa is mainly the same as we used for the map of Europe. It is based on appearance of creatures and encompasses the same categories: anthropomorphic (human shaped), zoomorphic, hybrid of human and animal, hybrid animal, undefined (creatures which appearance is variable, ambivalent or invisible). In addition, phytomorphic (plant-like) creatures that have no instances in Europe are present in Africa.



Figure 1. A fragment of maps of Mythical Creatures of Africa.

Understanding that our database is far from complete, we will continue developing the web map. Geographers and academic folklorists will be invited to co-operate in developing the database.

The user groups targeted are children of various age and general public as well as amateur folklorists. The map as a piece of art, made specifically attractive combining old and modern cartographic design elements, can raise people's interest in folk-lore and leads to better understanding of other cultures in Europe. The database is a kind of geographic inventory that may be of use for anyone interested in mythology and ethnology.

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