

Translation from the German original by Hedda Joyce

Some remarks on the Venezuelan stone called 'Kueka' located in the Berlin Tiergarten (part of the 'Global Stone Project')

1. Problems
2. Questions to clarify the problems
3. Research
4. Results summarized
5. Results in detail [only in the German version]
6. Literature on Pemón mythology (compilations), youtube contributions [only in the German version]

1 Problems

- 1.1 The film shown on youtube 'Etapontik ro etomo - la lucha continúa' by the Funda Cine/Fundacin para el desarrollo cinematográfico regional + La Universidad de Zulia (hereafter called 'film 1') appears to be at the start of the debate about the 'sacredness' and the significance of the stone: in particular the 'myth' which describes the stone as one of two petrified mythological ancestor figures of the Pemón Indians. An earlier version of the film must have existed, which was used as a basis for the 'film 3a' and 'film 3b'.
- 1.2 In the course of the 9.12 minutes film, a non-indian lady who appears to be a member of an environmentalist organization asserts the said stone was of jasper.
- 1.3 At 3.51, the sub-title reads: 'the stone is very sacred, one does not touch it. Even though we are from [sic] Pemón, we never touched it.'
- 1.4 Any Alarcón, introduced as ecologist, (at 5.32) belies that the 'Austrian' artist W. v. Schwarzenfeld' chose the stone Kueka "arbitrarily and regardless of the high cultural importance the stone has for the Pemón community."
- 1.5 At 7.10, Mrs. Alarcón says that "the Pemón council of elders" was demanding the return of the stone; that without this stone, Pemón culture would perish, the Pemón would lose their dignity and therefore suffer an identity crisis.

2 Questions

The following is to be clarified:

- 2.1 Is there a legend or myth associated with the stone? And if so, does it have anything to do with the origin of the Pemón people? And/or is the stone a personification of one or several of the groups ancestors and therefore to be considered sacred?
- 2.2 Is the stone a jasper? Is jasper a sacred stone of the Pemón?
- 2.3 Is it allowed to touch a sacred object?

- 2.4 Is the stone "highly significant" to Pemón culture and society?
- 2.5 Who is "the Pemón people" and is their culture, dignity and identity damaged in any way?
- 2.6 Who is protesting and requesting the return of the stone?

3. Research

I have been conducting research in Pemón culture and history since 1993. During six visits to the Gran Sabana, I spent more than 20 months with Pemón people. In January 2011, I heard of the conflict about 'Kueka' and went to see the stone in the Berlin Tiergarten. I checked the relevant literature and asked colleagues for advice. In March and April 2011, I visited the Gran Sabana and the very place where the stone originated from. I visited the nearby villages (Mapaurí and Kumarakapay) where those Pemón are living who are demanding the stone back. I also went to the town of Santa Elena (some 42km away) where the relevant officials are based. I interviewed a number of people whom I presumed to have knowledge about the conflict including its background and course of events which followed. Those were:

- 3.1 Three young Pemón, who worked as rangers for INPARQUES at the Quebrada de Jaspe (the entrance of which is at a distance of about 300meters from the place where the stone was collected from).
- 3.2 A Pemón lady who lives in Santa Elena and has followed the conflict since she is a friend of the person mentioned in 2.6 (who considers the stone a sacred object which must be returned).
- 3.3 Her husband, who works in tourism in Santa Elena.
- 3.4 The wife of a leader of the protests of the Pemón.
- 3.5 A Venezuelan topographer and explorer of the Gran Sabana, possibly the person with the best knowledge of the region's geography and history.
- 3.6 An officer at the "municipio", who was (or, still is) in charge of the affair (a Pemón person).
- 3.7 The bishop of Santa Elena who recently published two DVDs about Pemón mythology.
- 3.8 A further 30 people (adult Pemónes) who turned out to have heard nothing about the stone. 7 others only told me what they had read/seen on the internet.
- 3.9 In addition, I searched the literature for a story which could possibly belong to the stone(s), i.e., I read all published compilations of Pemón mythology.

4 Results, summarised

The stone has nothing to do with the mythology or religion of the Pemón. The stone is not a petrification or embodiment of an ancestor of this ethnic group. The stories in 'film1' are simply invented and have nothing to do with this particular stone. The myths about the origin of the Pemón and about their ancestors are different from the story told in 'film1' and also different from the story that is told in the Spanish subtitles.

A correct version of the Pemón myth of origin is given in 'film4', a production of the Venezuelan Ministry of Culture/National Chamber of Culture. This film was professionally produced in cooperation with two Venezuelan ethnologists and is, in contrast to the other four films, based on thorough research and factual knowledge.

In 'film 1' (second column in the table in the German version), a "Hansel and Gretel" type fairy tale is told in Pemón. There is no mention of a stone or a petrification in this story. By the way, the Pemón do not believe that they originate from Hansel and Gretel - nor any Pemón version of those. (The story is not well told and is incomplete, or cut off by the film makers, but nonetheless it contains typical Indian rhetoric elements - so it might not simply be "made up". Still, the story has nothing to do with the stone called 'Kueka'.

The Spanish commentary that is presented as a 'translation' of the Indian text (column 3) is a completely different story - more like a "Romeo and Juliet" story and connects this in some way with the stones. This story, not corresponding with the Pemón text in the film, I consider as freely invented. Even if this was not the case: In Pemón mythology, there are many similar episodes. However, they do not concern the origin of humanity or the ancestors of the Pemón. Note that this story does not appear in the Pemón text of the film.