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ORACLE-MAGIC OF THE AZANDE *

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I. INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE present Paper is devoted to an analysis and description of the oracle-system and the attempt to answer the difficult psychological problems which arise from native belief in their magic, and to show how the machinery of oracles is adapted to sustain their faith and so carry out useful social processes.

2. (a) GATHERING OF THE BENGE.

Amongst the many forms of divination¹ employed by the Azande, *benge* holds a place apart. This will be seen clearly when I give the social contexts in which it is used. Firstly, however, the method of use must be described. *Benge* is a red powder obtained from a forest creeper, which, when mixed with water, forms a paste. This paste is administered to chicken and causes spasms which, according as they are fatal or passing, determine the answers to the various questions addressed to the magic.

To keep to chronological order in description—*benge* must first be obtained. This is a dangerous and arduous task, as the plant does not grow in Zandeland, but in the more wooded regions to the south of the great Wells river, in the homelands of the Mangbettu and Abarambo. The distance alone, one of some hundreds of miles from the Azande of the Sudan, made the journey arduous, and the hostility of the Mangbettu and Abarambo involved continual danger and humiliation. For these peoples, as owners of the forests, often killed and always exacted large presents from the *benge* gatherers. Apart from these hardships, the travellers had to endure the privations of abstinence demanded in all important magical endeavour. (Throughout the entire expedition, from the setting out to the return, the traveller must avoid all sexual cohabitation, his daily routine and enjoyment; he must abandon the habit of smearing his body with oil, which, to the Zande, is to abandon cleanliness and the comfort of having a good appearance. He must refuse all dark-skinned animals such as the favoured flesh of the bush-buck and of the red wild pig, and of the wart-hog, and of the kob, and of the buffalo and of many other beasts. Also he must not eat the strong-smelling

¹ Divination and oracles are words taken over with classical associations. Whether the distinction in classical usage is really applicable to Zande culture or not need not be discussed here.

white flesh of the elephant nor the odorous flesh of fish, for these are smelling animals and unclean to men associated with the magic *benge*. Likewise he must shun some of his favourite vegetables, such as the *morombida* and *mboiyo*, for these are "loosening vegetables," and are unclean. To deny himself these additions to his daily gruel for a long period is a trying restriction for a Zande.¹

Owing to prohibitions of a medical and political nature, the Azande of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan may not cross in to the Belgian Congo, and, in consequence, it is no longer possible to observe journeyings in pursuit of the *benge* magic on the British side of the political boundary, and their organization as well as their romance have to be woven together from the recollections of old men and from Belgian accounts. I will commence with a native account told to me by an informant.²

"You consult the oracle about your affair, as 'I am going to dig up *benge*, if I will die on the way *benge* kill the fowl, if I will not die *benge* you spare the fowl.' If *benge* spares the hen, you get together about twenty men. You tell your chief that you are going to dig up *benge*. The chief collects dogs' teeth and giraffe tails and gives them to you. He says, 'You go with these presents and buy the way to the *benge* with them. Thus you go to the chief in the *benge* country and give him the dogs' teeth and giraffe tails and baboon legs. He will show you the way to the *benge* and you listen to him, do you understand?' You go away to this chief and give him a baboon's leg. You tell him that you will drink blood with him, and that if he hides the *benge* from you he will die from the blood, but that if he shows the *benge* to you he will be well with the blood. He says to you, 'All right, sit down, we will drink blood with you.' You drink blood with this chief and he shows you the way to the *benge*. You go with men to the *benge*."

Bishop Lagae says that in the past the Azande did not dare to enter into these hostile and gloomy regions without a knowledge of the tongues of the foreigners. In later times a chief would organise an expedition,

¹ Bishop Lagae has written an article in *Congo*, 1921, Tome 1, on "Les procedes d'augure et de divination chez les Azande." His article is a short one, and although in some respects inaccurate, it was a considerable assistance to me in that I was acquainted with the methods of augury before making enquiries from the natives. In noting the taboos which have to be observed, he says "La non observation de ces prescriptions en leverait au *benge* toute sa force et toute sa valeur."

² I have given this and other native texts in a free English translation, as I do not wish to overburden the narrative with either long texts in the native language or with literal transcriptions.

equip it with presents of ivory and girl slaves and send it into the stranger lands of the south. Individuals, he says, would also make these distant journeys.¹

The accounts which the Azande of the Bahr-el-Ghazal have given me, such as that already quoted, differ somewhat from that of Bishop Lagae. They have told me that several men, often under a *bakumba* or chief's deputy, or under someone who had made the journey before, would club together to make a *benge* expedition. They would then inform the chief and receive his permission for the journey. He would give them presents such as hairs of the red pig and of the giraffe, legs of baboon and dogs' teeth with which to trade.² They used not only to bribe the owners of the soil to allow them an unmolested passage to and from the woods in which the *benge* creeper grew, but also to exchange their presents for the *mamberi*, a broad-bladed knife of Mangbettu workmanship, the emblem of chief's deputyship; spears made by foreign smiths; for the curved knife *zékuda* of the Abarambo and Mangbettu as well as for a red paste procured from the *zali* tree, with which they daub their black hair.

Before going to their chief, the adventurers consulted the *benge*-oracle as to the chances of the journey, whether they would die or whether they would come home laden with baskets of the precious magic root. If *benge* agreed to their project and their chief gave his permission for their expedition and provided them with presents, they set out. Many surprises awaited the new members of the party, the pygmies of the Congo, the artificially-deformed heads of the Mangbettu and their carved wooden figures, whilst the new customs which they observed, the changes in vegetable life and the greatness of the river Wells left lasting imprints on their minds. They will tell one to-day of the ferocity and cannibalism of the Abarambo and how they were greeted with cries of *nombi ! nombi !* (flesh ! flesh !).

¹ Quand le souvenir des batailles était encore vivant les Avongara (chefs) craignent d'envoyer des hommes en groupe pour aller couper le *benge*. . . Les Avongara envoient des individus isolément. Ils faisaient un choix judicieux parmi leurs serviteurs les plus dévoués, au courant de la langue de la région où ils devaient se rendre. Ces envoyés avaient soin de ne point se faire passer pour des Azande.

In all matters which concern the gathering of the *benge* plant, Bishop Lagae was better placed in the Belgian Congo than an investigator can be in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

² There is a considerable difference between these small presents and the slave-girls mentioned by Lagae, and the ivory mentioned by Junker. Junker says that the Chief Mbio sent an embassy to the Chief Ansea to procure *benge*, for which they gave 15 loads of ivory, which to me sounds incredible. Junker, Vol. I, p. 436.

Once in foreign territory they sought out the chief and made him presents in exchange for his permission to collect the *benge* root free from the attacks of the inhabitants. In spite of this protection many parties never came home but were murdered by the Mangbettu and Abarambo. They then sought out men of the country, gave them presents and made blood-brotherhood with them. These men showed them the way to the dark woods, often near streams, in which the creeper thrives. The creeper appears to be of two kinds, the *nawada* and the *andehe*, of which the birds are said to eat and die in large numbers from its properties. Lagae describes these creepers thus: "Le *Nawada*, liane de 2 à 3 centimètres d'épaisseur, la racine rouge de cette liane fournit un *benge* qui, réduct en pâte, perd vite sa force et ne peut servir qu'un jour; le *benge andehe* . . . ce *benge* est plus fort que la *nawada*. La pâte en est utilisable pendant deux ou trois jours. C'est aussi le plus recherché."

They dig up the roots of these creepers, clean them, and scrape them with a knife into a powder, which remains for three days in the sun. Rain is always a danger, as a wetting would spoil the *benge* powder, and if the wind is threatening, they remove it to the little hut which they have constructed as a "pied à terre" in the *benge* country. At the end of a few weeks they have collected enough of the powdered root to return home with it in baskets covered inside and outside with the leaves of the banana or of the *ngmongborongba*. They do not carry the baskets on their heads as their hair would fall out owing to its proximity to the *benge*, but they bear them on their shoulders. At the crossing of each river, says Bishop Lagae, the bearers must draw a little water and sprinkle it over the baskets—he quotes a Zande as saying:—

"ka i asi nga hime gbwa
ki he ukidi benge naniya."

"They must not simply cross water, but they must sprinkle the *benge* with it."

On their return, they all make a contribution from their baskets to their paramount chief, and his *Putu benge*, the official consultant of the oracles, will make a trial test. He will ask *benge* if all is well, if the taboos have been observed, and if, indeed, it is true magic they have brought home, and not merely a red powder. If *benge* agrees, then the

chief will send them home, but if *benge* says that the taboos have not been observed, then heavy punishment will await the gatherers.

I have described the collecting of the *benge* magic, but not from observation. Since to-day no one is allowed over the Anglo-Belgian boundary, and since no boundary markets have been established, the Azande in the Sudan find great difficulty in obtaining the magic, and the quantity is always insufficient for social needs. However, men are always prepared to run the risks of a sentence of imprisonment to obtain this powder of such great social value, and a system of "benge-running" has, amongst the Azande with whom I worked, taken the place of the former expeditions.¹

2. (b) THE CONSULTATION OF THE BENGE-ORACLE.

Every paramount chief had two or three *Putu benge*, the regular officiators of the oracle, and the *benge* was always kept in a lonely hut in the bush, under the charge of one of these officials, or under the care of small boys called *awili mwooyo*, little ones in the bush,² the children of Azande under the leadership of one of the chief's small sons.

The *Putu benge* officiates for about a month at a time, and during the whole period he must observe the taboos rigidly. He must have no sexual intercourse, he must avoid all unclean food, the strong-smelling flesh of certain animals, and the putrid flesh of all beasts, and those vegetables which cause wind. In the past, the *Putu benge* sometimes had his testicles crushed on the orders of his chief, so that he would not break the sex taboos.

I wish to emphasise the extreme care taken with the chief's *benge*, the preliminary test of efficacy made with all the newly-gathered magic substance, the isolation of the *benge* hut in the bush, the strict taboos of the *Putu benge*, which made his life during his period of office like that of a man in mourning for death, because, as we shall show later, the chief will consult the oracle officially in matters of public interest, such as war or the offering of first-fruits to God in drought, or in all legal disputes,

¹ How *benge* is of social value is a theme which is developed in the latter part of my paper. Lest, however, it should be thought that I am laying too much stress on its value I quote Bishop Lagae, whose experience of the Azande is great, and who says "En un mot, l'angure est l'une des institutions les plus importantes de la vie sociale."

² Lagae calls them *azaungu*, and quotes a Zande as saying, *i hi songo wa gilo benge, wagila pa kpya*, which means they remain under the taboos of *benge* as under the taboos of death.

whilst the Azande will only consult the oracle on matters of private or family concern.¹ This difference of function will, however, be discussed in a later section.

If a Zande has no *benge* he can usually, even to-day, buy a little or beg a little, or get a chief's deputy to consult the oracles for him. The price of *benge* is high, but it is very difficult to say what price is actually paid, as the whole transaction is in secret, and if anyone has *benge* to-day he will not generally admit his possession of it, as he fears imprisonment. Lagae says that in the Belgian Congo, where there are no restrictions, "Le *benge* a une valeur marchande très élevée. Il n'est pas rare qu'on remette une femme en échange d'un grand panier de *benge*. Une bonne poignée de *benge* se vend actuellement (1921) 1 franc." The price is certainly higher in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

When a Zande and not a chief wishes to consult the oracle, he has to find a man who has kept the taboos, to give the poison to the fowls, and another man, who must also have observed the sex and food taboos, to address the *benge* in the stomach of the hen. This may not be easy, as most men will have either had sexual connection within six days of the morning on which he wishes to consult the oracle, or will have eaten some of the forbidden meats or vegetables within three or four days. However, he will usually be able to find a *boro gila*, or a man who is wearing a waistband of cord made from the inner bark of the *dakpa* tree as a sign of mourning, and who must have observed the ritual prohibitions for the regulated period. A man who had not observed the taboos would not carry the *benge* or even go near it, far less would he think of officiating with it. It must be noted here that the length of the time in which a man must observe the taboos is not rigidly defined and different men will give one different estimates. So that, although sexual connection has been said to be prescribed for six days previous to the oracle, many men will be content if they have been chaste for five or even four days.

There is no rule against the man himself addressing the *benge* or even acting as *Putu benge*. The latter course, however, is very unusual,

¹ The chiefs say that they are not Azande. When I use the word "Azande" in a general sense I shall, however, be referring to chiefs and commoners alike. When I contrast the Azande with the chiefs I shall be referring to the commoners in contrast to the noble clan of chiefs. The context will always make clear in which of these two senses the word is used.

and generally a man asks two friends to act for him. He does not pay them. Having found a man or two men who have observed the sex and food taboos, the Zande can, so long as it is not the day after the new moon, take his doubts with him to have them quieted by *benge*. The ceremony will always take place in secrecy in the bush, either in a clearing made in the grass or in the already cleared corner of an out-of-the-way cultivation. The time of the ceremony is in the early morning, though they will often wait until the sun has dried the grass, as the Zande hates damp.

I will let a Zande describe first what happens when the oracle is consulted.

"They observe taboos for five days. They consult *benge*. That man who has observed the taboos of *benge* goes to consult the oracle. Men capture some chickens to go after him. They arrive at the place of *benge*. The officiator takes a fowl from the basket, places it between his toes, takes the brush and soaks it in the *benge*, opens the mouth of the fowl and pours the *benge* into it. He addresses *benge*, saying, '*Benge*, you are *benge*, in the throat of the hen; I will die *benge* kill the hen; I will not die *benge* spare the hen.' *Benge* kills the hen. That is you will die. He takes another fowl saying, 'As I have spoken my affair, I will not recover *benge* kill the fowl. *Benge* spares the fowl.' He goes to his house and sends a man with the wing of the hen to where that man is for whom *benge* killed the fowl.

"It is finished."¹

I will now describe the procedure myself from observation. The *Putu benge* goes on in front with the *benge* to prepare the customary articles necessary for the ceremony. He clears a small space in the grass and then goes and plucks a big leaf, some blades of grass, two oval leaves of the *muwe* tree and some other leaves. He will also cut some branches of near-by shrubs. Water he will have brought with him in a gourd. With these objects he returns to the small clearing he has made in the bush by treading down the grasses, and sits upon the ground. He makes a small hole in the earth, in which he places his big leaf and the *benge* powder on the leaf. He then takes the blades of grass and cuts them

¹ All other texts in this paper were taken down by myself. This one, however, was written by a Mission boy. I have written it as he wrote it, but the description is inaccurate. He should have said "I will recover" and not "I will not recover." Also if, as above, a man were addressing *benge* on his own behalf he would keep the wing of the fowl and not send it anywhere. Accounts by Mission boys need very careful checking.

across in two places, leaving a little bundle of stalks some five or six inches long, which he binds round with another blade. He places this brush on the big leaf near the *benge* powder. He takes the two leaves of the *muwe* tree and, placing one in the other, he cuts the ends of both into a point at tips and stalks. This is for pouring the *benge* into the mouth of the fowl. He takes two other leaves and fastens them together, using the stalks as pins, into the form of a cup, which will be used to transfer a little water from the gourd to the *benge* powder. Next he takes his branches, and with a knife removes the outer covering of bark, leaving the bast in his hands. This he puts on one side to be used later as cord for tying the legs of the chicken. All is now ready, and he sits down to await the arrival of the others who are to be present and who are bringing the chicken.

There may be only one man or there may be several men who have questions to put to the oracle. Each comes with his chicken in an open-wove basket bent in and tied at the top. They follow the *Putu benge* to the chosen spot in the open bush and lay their baskets by his side. One of them, who has observed the food and sex taboos, now goes and sits opposite the *Putu benge* a few feet away from him. This man is the *sima benge*, and it is he who will address the *benge* in the stomach of the fowl. The other men, if they have not observed the taboos, or if they have wives who are in their menstrual periods, will not approach the *benge* but will sit down a long way off, though near enough to hear the words with which the *sima benge* will address the oracle.

They now commence to consult the oracle. The *Putu benge* takes a chicken and, drawing down its wings, he fastens them with feet enclosed between his big and next toes. He sits with the left leg outstretched holding the chicken, and tucked under it his right leg bent at the knee. He lifts the gourd at his side and pours some water into the leaf cup and thence into the leaf basin containing the *benge*. He pours just enough for the *benge*, after effervescence, to form a paste by absorbing all the water. He takes the little grass brush and twirls it round in the *benge*, which adheres to it, and places it on the leaves with ends cut into a point and folds the edges of the leaves together. He holds the grass brush enclosed in the leaves in his left hand and opens the beak of the chicken with his right hand. He tips the end of the leaves into the chicken's mouth and allows the juice of the poison to run down the leaves into

the throat of the fowl. He squeezes the leaves to press all the juice out of the *benge* and, whilst laying the brush on the ground, he bobs the fowl's head up and down to assist swallowing. The chicken remains between his toes, with its rump on the ground, facing him.

At this point the *sima benge*, having been previously instructed as to the facts of the case to be laid before *benge*, begins to address the magic in the stomach of the fowl. Henceforth, until the first part of the ceremony is over, he will continuously address *benge*. After some two minutes of address, the chicken will be given another dose of the poison. If it is a tiny chicken this will suffice, and the *sima benge* will continue to address the *benge* in its stomach. Larger fowls receive three or even four doses.

There is no defined set of words in which the *sima benge* will make his address. Indeed, as he speaks for some five minutes, and as the subjects of consultation vary, this would not be practicable. But the address, nevertheless, runs in traditional phraseology, and these phrases will be heard whenever *benge* is consulted, the rest of the address depending upon the nature of the case. There is no formula.¹

The man who is addressing the magic in the stomach of the fowl must ensure that it shall have all the facts of the case put before it, so that it may reach a decision based on full knowledge. Thus he is careful to mention over and over again the name of the man who wishes to consult the oracle, and he points him out to the *benge* with his outstretched arm. He will also mention the man's name and his father's name and his clan name, and where he lives. So also they inform *benge* of like details concerning any other persons of whom they may speak in the *sima*. They must lay clearly before the oracle all the other circumstances of the case, and exactly what question they require an answer to.

Thus we will take an instance of a man who wishes to marry a girl. I will give an actual case, though the words used in the address are only a précis of the speech actually delivered. The man would not undertake matrimony without the assurance of *benge* that it would be a successful and enduring bond.

¹ I have in this article used the native word "*sima*" or the English word "address" for the speech of the *sima benge*. The words "spell" or "question-spell" might legitimately have been used. The spell in all Zande magic is variable and contrasts with the set-formulae of Polynesia and Melanesia.



The *sima benge* tells the oracle that Zingbondo, of the Ambadimo clan, the son of Perenge, has come to consult it about his marriage. He lives in Ango's country, and wishes to marry Auwa, the daughter of Ngere, of the clan of the chiefs. Linde, of the Avundua clan, the son of Bangbi, has already paid ten spears for the girl, but she does not wish to marry him. She wishes to marry Zingbondo. Well, shall the father of the girl, Ngere, send back to Linde his ten spears and accept the ten spears of Zingbondo instead? Well if he does this, will his daughter die when she goes to live with Zingbondo, or will she live with him for five years, for ten years, always.¹ Now, *benge*, you hear the position, you tell us the truth. If all is well, if Auwa is Zingbondo's wife, you kill the little chicken, *benge*, you hear it, kill the little chicken, chief, you hear it, kill the little chicken

Benge mo gi e imi wili kondo gbia
Benge you hear it kill little fowl, chief

mo gi e imi wili kondo.
 you hear it kill little fowl

But if all is not well, if Auwa is not Zingbondo's wife, if she will die when she goes to live with him in Ango's country, you spare the little chicken, you hear it, *benge*, you hear it, chief, you spare the little chicken.

Mu kusi wili kondo mu gi e benge,
 You spare little fowl, you hear it *benge,*

mu gi e gbia, mu kusi wili kondo
 you hear it chief, you spare little fowl

Now, *benge*, it is a lie, you tell us the truth:

Zile du mu gumba ni lengo.
 Lie is you speak with truth.

There is no witchcraft here (he plucks grass and casts it behind him), you tell us the truth, Auwa is Zingbondo's wife, *benge*, do you hear it, *benge*, you kill little chicken."

¹ Though two questions are asked, whether Ngere shall return the spears of the first suitor and take those of the second suitor, and whether the marriage will prove successful, actually these are all part of the same question and there is no chance of confusion arising.

If Zingbondo was to marry the girl, the spears would have first to be returned to the former suitor and *benge* would have to agree to the newly-proposed marriage. Zingbondo would have obtained the father's consent before consulting the oracle.

It is in this vein that the *sima benge* will address at length the magic inside the chicken. I have given in Zande one or two phrases which occur again and again in the *sima*, terminating each bout of oratory.

Now if *benge*, in the above instance, consents to the marriage by promising its success, for *benge* can see into the past and the future, it will kill the hen. After the last dose of the poison the hen, by this time in a very perturbed state, is taken by the *Putu benge* from between his toes and held in the hand of his outstretched arm. Held by its feet the chicken, overcome by the poison, will often fall backwards, and the *Putu benge* will jerk it forward so that it faces him. The *sima benge*, during this critical minute, presses his address with more insistence, putting the case again to the magic and urging it vehemently and with gesticulation. If the hen is to die, it will soon give a few spasmodic shudders, and then is thrown into the grass, where it expires in spasms.

In this case it is well; Zingbondo can marry Auwa without any doubts as to the future. But if *benge* sees trouble ahead, that Auwa will sicken and die in her new husband's home,¹ then *benge* will spare the hen. For if the hen, held in the *Putu benge's* outstretched arm and jerked backwards and forwards, is not to die, it will show no great signs of distress, nor will it be seized with severe spasms. In this event the *Putu benge* will take a strip of bast and will tie it round the fowl's leg, so that it can easily be recaptured later, and will then toss it to the ground to run about and recover from the poison.

But in this case Zingbondo will not marry Auwa. It is unfortunate, but *benge* knows that only disaster will come from the marriage, for *benge* has seen it looming ahead.

The verdict of the oracle is not, however, final until a second and corroborative verdict has been obtained from *benge*. A complete oracle consists of two tests. The first test described above is called *bambata sima*.² The second test is known as *gingo*. The second test may take place directly after the first test, or it may be delayed for a considerable

¹ My friend, Dr. R. W. Firth, with whom I discussed parts of this paper, suggested to me that the consulter of the oracle had in mind not only the death of his wife but also such defects as laziness, temper, and other forms of incompatibility. This is probably so, but I had not made special inquiry into the question.

² When pressed, a native told me that *bambata sima* was the term for the first test. I am not sure that the term is always or even generally so used. The phrase means first address, and is useful to denote the first test in contrast to the *gingo* or second test.



period. In one instance I have known two years to elapse between the first test and the *gingo*, or second test.

Now, in the *gingo* the action of the *benge* must be opposite to its action in the *bambata sima*. If in the *bambata sima* the hen dies, then in the *gingo* the hen must live. If in the *bambata sima* the hen lives, then in the *gingo* the hen must die. In the *gingo*, or second test, the question is always asked in a negative form. Thus, to take the case already mentioned, in which Zingbondo wishes to marry Auwa. In the first test, as we have seen, *benge* killed the fowl and consented to the marriage. In the second test they will say to the oracle, "No, it is a lie which you have told us,¹ Auwa is not Zingbondo's wife. If you have lied to us kill the fowl, if you have told us the truth spare the fowl." If *benge* has lied, then it will kill the fowl again, if *benge* has told the truth, then it will spare the fowl. If the oracle had not agreed to the marriage in the *bambata sima* and showed its disapproval by sparing the hen, then they would have addressed it in the *gingo*, thus: "*Benge*, you have lied to us, Auwa is Zingbondo's wife. If you have lied to us, then spare the fowl; if you have told the truth, then kill the fowl."

The killing or sparing of the fowl do not give either a positive or a negative answer—that depends upon the form of the question asked.

If *benge* makes two different actions by killing one fowl and sparing the other it is a valid verdict, whether negative or positive; but if *benge* spares both fowls or kills both fowls, then its decisions are invalid for reasons which will shortly be explained.

3. (a) PROBLEM IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE BENGE.

There is little chance for the ethnologist to see *benge* by accidentally finding it in operation, as it is always held secretly in the bush in the early morning. The questions asked the oracle-magic are strictly private, and only the consultant's private friends are permitted to be present. But as the ethnologist gets to know a few of the natives well he will find that, so long as he is prepared to observe the rules of taboo and respectful behaviour in the presence of the oracle and does not laugh at its findings, he will soon be able to attend these ceremonies without great difficulty.

¹ In using the word "lie" to translate the Zande word *sile*, it should be borne in mind that the more correct translation would generally be "mistake." It means that the person who is referred to is in error, and one must judge from the context whether he is in error by ignorance or by intention. It is not impolite to say to a man *sile du*, it is untrue.

When he has attended several *benge* he will find that certain problems connected with the administration of the magical root and with the interpretation of its actions force themselves upon his mind. I always asked about these problems either directly after the oracle had finished, or even whilst it was in progress, from the bystanders.

The European who witnesses the administration of the doses of the poison may soon notice that the number of doses given to fowls of the same size vary. Normally, two doses are given to a tiny fowl, three doses to a pullet or cockerel, and four doses to a fully-grown bird. But the observer will notice that the *Putu benge* sometimes gives three doses to one poult, and then on the same morning two doses to another poult of a similar size. Or he gives two doses to one tiny fowl and three doses to another.

Now, at first I thought that the natives were "cheating," and that, wishing a positive rather than a negative verdict, they deliberately "got round" the chains of tradition whilst, at the same time, leaving the procedure intact. I had, however, entirely misjudged the natives, or rather I had read into their culture my own scepticism. For on my suggesting that the *benge* was not being administered properly, that if they gave three doses of *benge* to a tiny fowl, whereas two doses was the normal number, it might be expected to die from the poison, and that if they gave two doses to a poult when three was the normal number, it might be expected to live, I was informed that this was due to my ignorance of the magic, and that however much *benge* one gave to a tiny chicken it would not alter *benge's* verdict. If, for instance, you said to *benge*, "X is ill, if he is to live you kill the fowl, if he is to die you spare the fowl," and the magic saw that X was to die, however many doses of *benge* you gave to the fowl it would still be alive at the end of the oracle.

The discrepancy in the number of doses given to the fowls is due to a certain conventional rule in the administration of the poison and not to any attempt to influence the verdict of the magic. Thus if the *benge* does not seem to have affected the bird at all after two doses, although this is the normal number, they will give it a third dose. For they must see that "*benge na manga kondo*," that is to say that the oracle must be seen working in the hen if there is to be an answer to the enquiry.

On the other hand, if, for instance, during the *dambata sima* or the first consultation of the oracle *benge* kills the fowl so quickly and surely

that the certainty of its answer is made manifest to the observers, although they make a second or confirmatory oracle, the *gingo*, they may only give one dose to the tiny chicken instead of the normal two, as it would be merely waste of valuable *benge* to give it a second dose, since they know that *benge* would certainly spare the second hen since it had previously given so quick and definite an answer by the manner in which it killed the first hen.

It will be seen that by this plasticity of rule it is easier to account for the greater number of valid *benge*, that is to say, *benge* in the first part of which the hen dies and in the second part of which the hen lives, or in the first part of which the hen lives and in the second part of which the hen dies.

It also shows that whilst it would be wrong to suppose that in varying the number of doses the *Putu benge* is trying to "get round" the oracle, it is nevertheless true that the traditionally prescribed procedure of consulting the oracle allows a certain plasticity which the consulter makes use of. Thus if "A" wants to marry a girl and *benge* kills the hen at once, thus giving a certain and favourable answer to the first part of the question (shall "A" marry the girl), he will probably give a dose less than the normal number, since he wishes the hen to live, in the second part of the question (if you have lied to us kill the hen)—but he will be acting quite properly in doing so; whereas if *benge* spared the first hen and thus gave an unfavourable answer in the first part of the oracle, he will probably give the full number of doses in the second part of the oracle, as he wishes the hen to die, and again he will be acting quite properly.

Or to take another example. "A" wishes to marry a girl and consults *benge*, "if the girl is mine, *benge* you kill the fowl, *benge*, you hear it, you kill the little fowl." Now, if the fowl shows no signs of distress at all after consumption of the normal number of doses of the poison but acts as though it had never swallowed any at all, he may give it one more than the normal number of doses on the grounds that the oracle is not in operation. This will probably affect the fowl and possibly kill it, which is the action "A" desires, but he is observing the traditional rules in giving the fowl the extra dose.

On the other hand, if this strange indifference of the hen occurs in the *gingo* or second test, *benge* having agreed to the marriage in the first test,

then he will not trouble to give an extra dose to the fowl, and again he will be acting by the traditional rules in omitting to do so. For the *gingo* has not the same importance as the *bambata sima*, and if *benge* agreed to the marriage in the *bambata sima* it may be presumed to have given a correct answer unless a taboo has been broken or witchcraft has been at work, and therefore the second verdict may be assumed.

Thus in our first problem, concerning the variation in the number of doses (they never vary by more than one dose) we see that in this way traditional usage, by allowing a certain degree of plasticity, gives greater social utility to the oracle.

I may add that without special physiological observations it would be impossible to explain the manner in which *benge* works in chicken. As fresh water is added generally between two tests, and as the poison has been exposed for the period between them, it might be supposed that the poison would be more likely to kill in the first instance and to spare in the second instance. But often *benge* will kill the first fowl, spare the second and kill the third, so that the explanation does not seem to hold. But I have certainly noticed that when there are four or five separate questions to put to the oracle the natives are inclined to ask all the *bambata sima* first, and afterwards all the *gingo* instead of alternating them. In this case the physiological working of *benge* might be expected to give a larger number of valid verdicts than if another method was adopted. However, this point has only occurred to me when writing up my notes, and I have made no special observations in the "field" to elucidate it.

There is a section of *benge* root in the British Museum, which has been marked strychnine by the donor.

I shall have to make a short digression to discuss whether *benge* is to the native a poison at all. We have seen that the native will tell us how birds eat the flowers or fruit of the *benge* creeper and die from the effects. Also we shall see later that the natives will sometimes be heard to discuss whether their *benge* has deteriorated with age. Also any Zande will tell us that if we were to give a fowl which had died in the oracle tests to a dog, or if we were to eat it ourselves, the dog or we would die. These statements lead us to suppose that the Azande regard *benge* as a poison in our sense of the word rather than as a "magic."

However, I was once, with some freedom of imagination, trying to explain to a native that we, like themselves, have two kinds of "medicine" which would kill men, and that to the first of these the white man's Government had no objection; for example, the blowing of a magic whistle whilst uttering a spell. On the other hand, the white man's Government had strong objections to the second kind of "medicine," which you could just put in the victim's food or beer—as for instance, I ventured to suggest, if a Zande put a handful of *benge* into a man's beer. The native replied at once that if you did not utter the *sima* (spell) the *benge* would not kill him. Whenever afterwards I put this question to a native whether, directly or indirectly, "would *benge* kill without the *sima*?" I received the answer "No."

When I publish my full notes on magic I will show how many "medicines" which work naturally, such as the lethal medicine of the hair of the red ant-eater, which is placed in the victim's beer and sticks in his throat, or such as the fish-poisons which are used to kill fish in a pool, are all accompanied by the spell (*sima*) and the taboos (*sino*), and the traditional procedure of the magic without which they are useless.

It will be seen that the statements of the natives that *benge* does not kill in a natural manner but by the aid of the spell is contradictory to their knowledge that birds and dogs die from it and that it loses its power through age. Such contradictions are frequent in native thought, and we must not attempt to exclude them for the sake of symmetry.¹

I will suggest finally that the native in many of his customs and beliefs possesses knowledge which is sufficient to enable him to see that many of his beliefs are erroneous. The contradiction between knowledge and stereotyped and socially prescribed beliefs is common enough in our own society, and the process by which they are both kept intact is well known to psychologists in the phenomenon of dissociation. However, I hope to deal with this question in another place.

3. (b) PROBLEM IN THE INTERPRETATION OF THE ORACLE.

A second problem which arises from a descriptive account of the oracle is how the native under certain circumstances interprets its findings. The observer would be unlucky if he watched half-a-dozen *benge* and did

¹ It is commonly asserted by Europeans that the Azande are possessed of numerous malignant poisons. However, I believe these assertions to be quite incorrect.

not notice that on occasions *benge* will spare the hen which is then tied by the leg with the bast of a tree and let loose to run about in the grass, but later is found to have expired in spasms. To my knowledge the contrary never occurs, a hen which has fallen as though dead never revives.

When this happens the native is somewhat perplexed, for above all he likes a clear answer to solve his doubts and to decide his course of action. Whereas if *benge* first spares the hen and then kills it after the oracle has been given and accepted, he is once more thrown into doubt and indecision.

The first time I saw this doubtful oracle occur was in the case of a youth who very much wanted to marry a certain girl. In the first test *benge* spared the hen and gave a verdict against marriage. The boy was very distressed and those present condoled with him. In the second test, however, when the oracle was directed to give a confirmation of its previous verdict, it spared the hen again, that is to say that it contradicted its previous decision. This contradiction, as will be explained later, was considered as being probably due to witchcraft, and the oracle was consulted a second time, its first statements being regarded as null and void. In the second oracle, *benge* consented in both tests to the marriage. The youth was delighted, but on his return home the fowl spared in the *gingo* of the first oracle died from the after effects of the poison. Its earlier death would have meant a clear decision against the marriage, and the boy was uncertain how its belated death was to be interpreted. He consulted the older men, who said that it would be correct for him to marry as *benge* had given a contradictory decision at first, and this contradictory decision held good even if the chicken died later. But the youth was not satisfied, dread of the death of the girl if he married her, with all its unpleasantness and expenses, was too great for him to rely upon oracles in which there was any degree of doubt. He must have a clear decision before he undertook the marriage, and he determined as soon as possible to consult *benge* again.

I have seen several instances such as the one just quoted, and I have reached the conclusion that, according to native opinion, when *benge* acts in this manner it is because it must give a reply to the question as put to it by the *sima benge* in his address, but also wishes to say that it sees something outside the question. The native is not therefore satisfied

with a verdict of this nature, even where it is in his favour. *Benge* sees something, he may not know precisely what, which modifies its answer. He came for a clear lead from the oracle and he has received a modified verdict to his question. His doubts are not dispersed, and he will consult the magic again, after some days or weeks, for a clear answer.

3. (c) THE PROBLEM OF CONTRADICTIONARY VERDICTS.

To give a valid verdict *benge* must kill one hen and spare the other. If it kills both hens or spares both hens then its verdict is null and void. I do not know how it is that some hens die from the effects of *benge* and that other hens survive the poison, but it might be surmised that frequently it kills both fowls or that both fowls survive, and such a surmise would be correct. This is very annoying to the native, because he has gone to considerable trouble and expense for no purpose whatever. He is not nonplussed, however. For one of three reasons *benge* has lost its magic—it may be too old, or a taboo may have been broken, or witchcraft may have been in play.

About the first explanation little comment is needed. The *benge* has been kept too long, and they must procure fresh *benge* to consult the oracle again. Age is sometimes given as a reason for the failure of *benge* to give a clear verdict if in the first three or four questions of the morning it fails to kill a fowl.

More serious is the breaking of a taboo. To understand this explanation of *benge's* deterioration it is necessary at the outset to grasp a fact, to be laboured again later, that *benge* is not to the native a "natural force" which can distinguish between truth and error, nor is it simply a powdered root which, when mixed with water, will sometimes kill domesticated fowl and will sometimes fail to kill them, and that as the fowl dies or lives so the natives agree to abide by the verdict. *Benge* is not a "natural force" at all, nor do I believe that it is regarded clearly and consistently as a poison capable of causing death by natural means. Nor is its trial upon a chicken a matter of luck by which they agree to abide. It is a treasured cultural possession, the knowledge of which was given to the Azande by God (*mboli*), which gains its magical power, the power which enables it to inform men about events in past and future hidden from the human mind, by its being gathered and kept by men who have observed all the restrictions of the food and sex taboos, and by

its being administered by the traditional procedure. If these taboos have not been kept, then *benge* is not "*benge*" at all, it is just a powdered root of a forest creeper found in the wooded regions to the south of the Welle river.¹

I cannot do better than let Bishop Lagae, my predecessor in the study of Zande customs, state the native view-point. Says he: "Le *benge* n'a donc de valeur aux yeux des Azande, que s'il est pur, indemne de toute souillure, cueilli et conservé avec toutes les prescriptions rituelles. Dans ce cas seulement il peut donner un oracle véridique. Si l'on n'observe pas ces prescriptions, le *benge* n'est qu'une poudre rouge vénéneuse, inapte à distinguer le vrai du faux, la culpabilité de l'innocence. L'observation des prescriptions prohibitives fait partie de son entité réelle. Le *benge* n'est spécifiquement du *benge*, que dans l'hypothèse où sa force n'a pas été étouffée par la non observance des prescriptions rituelles. En dehors de ce cas, le *benge* ne distingue rien, il ne dit pas la vérité" . . .

To-day, when all *benge* is acquired by an illegal and heavily punished system of "*benge*-running" between the British and Belgian possessions and exchanges of spear-money and goods for the magical substances have often to take place quickly, in secret and at night, it is not always possible to test the *benge* by a trial oracle. In consequence, the Zande traders of the Belgian Congo have not always observed the taboos of abstinence incumbent upon anyone who touches the *benge*, and the purchaser in the Sudan finds that he has been swindled, for instead of receiving a precious magical substance he has received a worthless red powder. He discovers this too late, when consulting the oracle. I have twice seen large quantities of this useless powder, purchased at considerable cost and at risk of imprisonment. It had to be thrown away as it was not magic, and as there is no means of rehabilitating the powder with magic. The breaking of a taboo is sometimes the explanation put forward if contradictory verdicts are given by newly-acquired *benge*.

A grasp of this fact, that *benge* is not a natural force, but is magic, or a cultural force, will also help us to understand the third possible and more generally accepted explanation of its failure to record valid verdicts.

Benge may be defeated by witchcraft—that is, the purpose of one great human possession may be defeated by another great human possession

¹ *Benge* should not be regarded as being in any way personified.

The White Magic of *benge* acquired by the perseverance and courage as well as by the self-sacrifice and abstinence of man may be negated by another heritage of man handed down by him from generation to generation, Black Magic. Reference to *mangu* (witchcraft) is usually the explanation given to account for the contradictory verdicts of *benge*.

In this case the consultation of the oracle will have to be abandoned upon that issue. However, it need not follow that witchcraft will interfere with other issues, nor that it will interfere with the question in hand upon another day, or even upon the same day, if the baneful influence of Black Magic has passed.

A fourth possibility may be mentioned here, but as it only arises in legal disputes, it is discussed more fully under the heading of "*Benge* as Legal Machinery," towards the end of this paper. Some men, very few, possess a type of magic, called *Zelengbondo benge*, which is able to influence the magic of *benge* so that a false decision is given in their favour.

3. (d) ACCEPTANCE OF VERDICTS.

As will have been seen from my account, the Zande puts his full trust in *benge*. For him it is a great heritage and he will often tell one:—

benge na gumbanga zile te, ga ani waraga du
benge does not speak error of us paper is,
benge does not err, it is our paper, for the native has learnt that the European is accurate because of his paper.

We have also seen that the findings of the oracle are, as it were, "fool-proof," and that whatever happens in the oracle-consultation, has its explanation at hand. Other oracles may make mistakes, but *benge* never. But it will naturally occur to the white man to ask what happens when the oracle gives a verdict which subsequently is proved to be wrong. Now, although what we have to say on this point also applies to a lesser degree to the other oracles, it had better be dealt with briefly and at once.

Firstly, most oracles of *benge* are given about questions to which its answers cannot well be proved incorrect, for, in the case of one answer, the enquirer never makes the test, whereas, in the other case, the findings of the oracle are largely in accord with the workings of nature. Thus, if a man says to *benge*, "I shall build my homestead in this place, will I die?" and the oracle says, "Yes, you will die," then the native is not

such a madman as to take the risk, so that its verdict is not tested. On the other hand, if *benge* says, "No, you will not die," the probability is that *benge* will be usually right, because *benge* is speaking of the next few years and cannot be expected to vouch for the distant future.

Secondly, the questions which are asked of *benge* are mainly stereotyped; they occur in set social contexts. A Zande would not, for instance, ask of *benge*, "Will I kill meat if I go out hunting to-morrow?" This is not one of the questions which one puts to *benge*.

Thirdly, were *benge* proved in error by a test case to the White Man, to the native it would be an instance of witchcraft. For example, if *benge* said that "A" had killed "B" by *mangu* (witchcraft) and "B's" relatives killed "A" in revenge and then cut his stomach open and found no *mangu* (which is always located in the stomach), then I think that they would say that witchcraft was present at the oracle. I suppose that such cases do actually occur; but if you ask a native what they would say in this event, he will always tell you that such an example cannot occur, for if *benge* says that "A" is a witch, then, on opening his stomach, you will find *mangu*. It is one of those many questions which seem so stupid to a native wherein the White Man asks what would happen if such and such a thing occurred when, in his opinion, such and such a thing never does occur.

3 (e) ANALYSIS OF THE MAGIC.

Before I go on to describe other methods of augury, I will make a short analysis of the morphology of the *benge* magic, showing what are its essential characteristics:—

- (1) THE TABOO.—It has to be gathered and kept and afterwards consulted under strict taboos of sex and food. If one of these taboos is broken, *benge* ceases to be magic.
- (2) TRADITIONAL PROCEDURE.—*Benge* must be consulted in the traditional manner—the withdrawal to the bush; the stereotyped mode of mixing the *benge* paste and of administering it to the fowls; the regulated number of doses; the *sima* or long address to the magic; the *gingo*, or second and confirmatory part of the oracle; the prescribed mode of interpreting the action of the magic on the fowl.
- (3) SOCIAL CONTEXT.—*Benge* is not consulted haphazard upon all matters, but always in certain stereotyped social contexts.

This I consider to be the most important aspect of our subject, but its discussion is postponed till later in the paper, so that the social custom of all means of divination described in this paper can be treated together.¹

It may also be especially noted here that the magic of *benge* is known to all, and that all who possess the powder by purchase, loan, gift or by any other means of acquirement, can use the magic, and that any male, small boy or old man, or adult, may administer the *benge* so long as he has observed the food and sex taboos, and all have the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the traditional procedure. Women, however, are excluded.²

They are not even allowed near the magic for fear of depriving it of its powers. *Benge* is not, therefore, an "owned magic," and the only restriction upon its use is that of sex.

(4) (a) DESCRIPTIVE ACCOUNT OF THE DAKPA ORACLE.

We shall now proceed to the description of another method of augury, that known as *dakpa* (*sorokana dakpa*—consult oracle with *dakpa*). The procedure of the augury is very simple and its description will be brief. Moreover, I have only seen the oracle in use once, and my information is neither full nor well checked. It may be supplemented, however, from Bishop Lagae's account.

A person who wishes to consult the oracles upon some important matter and he cannot obtain *benge*, or upon some less important affair, or often as a preliminary to *benge*, will consult the "white ants" by placing branches from magical trees, the *dakpa* and *kpoiyo*, in an ant-hill and seeing which of the two the termites will eat.

This method of consulting the oracles is very popular amongst all Azande, especially amongst women, partly because it costs nothing and is simple, needing no elaborate apparatus such as *benge* necessitates, and partly because it is reliable. Many methods of augury require human agency to manipulate them or are themselves a form of human activity.

¹ See page 39 ff.

² Actually there is a woman in Ngere's country who practises *benge*, but she is the only one I have heard about. As far as I can remember she is a widow who lives by herself. The reason given to me for the exclusion of women was that it must be assumed that women will always have had sexual connection with somebody, if not her husband. This, however, was only the statement of one man—possibly a cynic.

This, the Azande realise, has its drawbacks; whereas the ants, as they say, do not listen to all the talk which is going on outside in the homesteads, but only hear the question put to them and will give an unbiassed verdict.

The oracle must be consulted under ritual restrictions. The observances are less strict and less clearly defined than those governing the procedure of *benge*. No one would be so stupid as to consult the termites on the day after he had had sexual intercourse or on the day after he had eaten the *mboiyo* or *morombida* vegetables or smelly flesh such as the elephant or fish, or indeed any meat kept for two or three days and inclined to smell. But still many men would risk consulting the oracle if they had abstained from such forbidden foods for 24 hours. Others would prefer to allow two days to elapse after indulgence in the tabooed foods or sexual intercourse. Also most men would be content if they abstained from the more risky dark-skinned animals such as the water-buck, the wild pig and the eland, whilst others, more careful, will extend their range of restriction.

They always consult the termites in the evening towards sunset. The man will go to a termite-hill near his home and one which he knows has not been deserted by the termites. He will not take branches of the *dakpa* and *kpoiyo* shrubs with him, as these are very common and he will be certain to find them near the termite-mound, but, arrived at the mound, he will look round for these two trees and will cut a branch from each. Then, taking the iron-hafted shaft of his spear, he will dig in the top of the hill and remove the surface earth, thus exposing the blind termites which much resent this disturbance. He will be careful to avoid their sharp claws, and will look for one of those big downward-running tunnels which are found in these hills, and he will take one branch in one hand and the other branch in the other hand, and on seeing the termites:—

i	na ya	we	ako	angbali	u
They	say	thus	oh	Termites	he
akpi	gi	gana	dakpa	li	u
will die	this	year	dakpa	eat,	he
chpinga le		kpoiyo		li.	
will not die		kpoiyo		eat.	

This is what a man will say in addressing the termites if he has come to consult about a sick friend as to whether he will live or die. When he has addressed the termites, he places the sticks, one in each hand, into the tunnel and there leaves them, placing a few lumps of termite-earth round them, and returns home.

He digs a hole in this manner if he is to consult the termites called *akiedo* and the termites called *abariba*; but if he is to consult the *abio* and *ngbaiimo* termites he will not dig a hole, but will simply place the branches on the path near the termite-hill, on that side where he sees that the termites have a run.

Early next morning he will go to the termite-mound to see whether they have eaten the *dakpa* and left the *kpoiyo* or eaten the *kpoiyo* and left the *dakpa*, or whether they have eaten both branches or have eaten neither of them.

If they have eaten the *dakpa* alone it is invariably a bad omen. In answer to the *sima* above it is a reply that the sick man will die this year. If the termites have eaten the *kpoiyo* alone it is invariably a good omen. In answer to the *sima* above it means that the man will not die this year. In either of these two cases the oracle should be consulted again, this second consultation corresponding to the *gingo* in the *benge* oracle. I believe that the same form holds for both, so that if the termites have eaten *kpoiyo* in the *bambata sima*, then they must eat *dakpa* in the *gingo*. When the *gingo* is held it will take place preferably in another termite-hill, as it is not wise to ask the same termites too often or they will not give an oracle at all.

If the termites do not eat either of the two branches, then the Zande says *ami na ka ka*, "they are doubtful," and therefore will not give an answer, or even that they just do not wish to give an answer. In this case the man will go another night to a different termite-hill and repeat the *sima* and procedure of augury.

Or it may be that the termites will eat both the *dakpa* and the *kpoiyo*. Lagae says that in this instance "Si les deux bâtons sont rongés inégalement, la présomption penche du côté de celui qui a été rongé le moins. Si donc le *kaow* (*dakpa*?) est attaqué moins que le *kpoiyo*, l'augure est plus ou moins favorable d'après la différence qu'on constate." I was told that if both shrubs were eaten then the oracle

was invalid, and that this might be due to the breaking of a taboo, but that it may more generally be attributed to witchcraft, or that it might just be due to the fact that the ants were hungry and were more intent on satisfying their hunger than answering the oracle.¹

If the Zande considers that it is Black Magic working against him he will be very angry and consult first the *iwa*, another process of augury presently to be described, and then *benge* as to who is using magic against him, and when he has discovered the name of the man he will ask a friend to take the *dakpa* and *kpoiyo* branches with him to the owner of the witchcraft. He will ask him why he wishes to do ill to the man who is consulting the ants, and will get him to blow water on to the *dakpa* and *kpoiyo* to remove the black magic before a new attempt is made to address the termites.

It seems, however, that some men lose faith and temper with the particular ants of a termite-hill, and after they have eaten both *dakpa* and *kpoiyo* twice, he will then proceed to give them the branches without first pronouncing the address (*sima*). If they eat both again he believes that he has "scored off" the ants by deceiving them. He says that they just eat because they are hungry and have not listened to his question.

If a man has not observed the taboos he may consult the oracles by proxy. A boy will go with him and will cut the *dakpa* and *kpoiyo*, will place them in the path or within the termite-hill, and will address the termites. Next morning, however, the man himself will come and see what verdict the termites have given him.

Whilst the branches are in or near the termite-hill the consulter of the oracle will not talk about the affair at all, as to do so might disturb the termites and involve a wrong verdict. Also when the verdict has been given it would be highly improper to throw away the pieces of branches into the bush. They will be taken home and placed in the roof of the hut or in the verandah, or, better still, in one of the ancestral shrines, where the visitor to a native homestead will often see them. If a man, who had received a favourable omen about a future event, were to throw away the *dakpa* and *kpoiyo* sticks, he might easily affect the manner in which the event will actually turn out.

¹ Here again we have a rational reason amongst irrational ones just as in *benge* age as well as the breaking of a taboo and witchcraft was a reason for the invalidity of the oracles.

4. (b) ANALYSIS OF THE MAGIC.

We shall now, as with *benge*, make a short analysis of the main characteristics of the magic of *dakpa* :—

- (1) THE TABOO.—As in *benge*, the oracle must be carried out under the observance of taboos. If the taboos are broken the termites will not give a valid verdict.
- (2) THE TRADITIONAL PROCEDURE.—The oracle must be consulted in the stereotyped manner, namely, at nightfall ; with the *dakpa* and *kpoiyo* and with no other tree ; with the correct type of *sima*, corresponding with the exact method of inserting the woods ; the prescribed means of interpretation of the action of the termites must be used.
- (3) SOCIAL CONTEXT.—This must be left for discussion in conjunction with other methods of oracle-taking, when its importance will at once be seen.

Here again, as with *benge*, the magic is known to everyone, and everyone may consult the termites without payment. In the case of *benge* there was an actual bar to women using the magic. In the case of *dakpa* this is not so, and the magic is very widely used by women in their affairs owing to its ease and cheapness. Even children ask the termites about their little troubles.

5. (a) DESCRIPTIVE ACCOUNT OF THE IWA ORACLE.

In many ways the next type of oracle to be described is the most interesting. In *benge* appeal is made to a magical powder administered to hens. In *dakpa* appeal is made to the termites. Whereas in *iwa* appeal is made to a small wooden instrument into which magic has been rubbed, and which is made by man and worked through his agency. All Azande agree that it is not so reliable as *benge* and *dakpa*, "*iwa* makes many errors," they say. But then it has one great technical advantage over *benge* and *dakpa*, for they can only answer one question, and in the case of *benge* there is the cost of valuable magic powder and two fowls, and in the case of *dakpa* the oracle takes a whole night to function, whereas "*iwa* tells many matters."

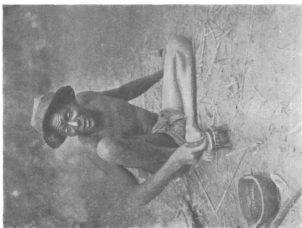
For instance, if a man thinks, as he generally will in any misfortune, that someone is injuring him with black magic, he can always consult

benge or *dakpa* or both, and receive confirmation or rejection of his suspicions. But he cannot very well go through all the names of the people whom he thinks may be injuring him to discover whether each one is using black magic against him by these long and, in one instance expensive, methods of augury. This is where the little wooden instrument *iwa* comes in useful. He can run quickly through the names of suspected users of Black Magic, and having discovered by this means the responsible individual, he can either inform him or, if he considers the affair important enough and wishes to be on sure ground, he can first check the verdict of *iwa* by using *dakpa* and checking *dakpa* by consulting *benge*. For the different oracles have their order and system, and one always consults *iwa* before *dakpa* and *dakpa* before *benge*, and never in a reverse order. *Benge* is always final.

The *iwa* is a miniature table-like construction; it is carved out of the *doma* tree, so often used in magic, or from the *kukurahu* tree. It is cut from one piece of the tree and has a round or oval flat surface, incised with knife-cuts, and is supported by two legs and a long tail. It stands about six inches high, and in length is from six to twelve inches. The instruments vary in size. The two legs are called *undu hu*, its legs, and the long tail, which is used as a handle in manipulating the instrument, is called *sa ha*, its tail. Over the table-like surface of the instrument is fitted a little round head, to which its flat surface is neatly proportioned. A barkcloth covering is tied over the head of the *iwa*. The *iwa* is also sometimes called *gbaga* and *bulu*, though I am not certain whether these are the names of trees or not. The main piece of the instrument is called *na ha* (its mother), and the movable head is called *wi-li* (child).

While the instrument is being made, from the moment when the man goes into the bush to look for a suitable tree from which to carve the *iwa* with an adze, he should observe the taboos of food and sex, as we have seen in the cases of *benge* and *dakpa*. He must avoid sexual connection, the eating of pungent flesh, and loosening vegetables.

Lagae says that after the wood has dried in the sun he will take some gum which flows from the *kpay* and pluck a small shrub, called *banzwa*. He burns the *banzwa* and mixes its root with the *kpay* gum, and rubs this carefully over the *iwa*, and then places on it the wooden lid-head and binds it round with barkcloth. It must be placed apart for two or three days where no one who has not observed the taboos will touch it,





after which it may be used. To use the *iwa*, it is necessary to have observed the restrictions with regard to women and food. A man must not have had connection with a woman for four days previous to manipulating the instrument, and he must not have eaten fish nor elephant flesh for a like period, nor *mboiyo* and *morombida* vegetables for two days. However, these periods of abstinence are variable.

Lagae says: "On peut néanmoins se libérer des prohibitions alimentaires par la précaution suivante: on calcine un morceau de viande d'éléphant et on frotte le *iwa* avec les cendres. On peut faire de même pour le poisson. Cela se fait une fois pour toutes." This practice is unknown amongst the Azande of the Bahr-el-Ghazal, perhaps because they very rarely see the flesh of elephant or fish.

Bishop Lagae also says that the Azande, in the Congo, having taken off the cord and cloth, previous to manipulation, scrape the bark of the *mbugare* with a knife on to the surface of the *iwa* already smeared with the gum of the *kpay*. Others use the cinders of the *willizaganduhu*, a little thorny brushwood which grows on the termite-mounds. Both of these substances cause a froth on the surface of the *iwa*, and such a froth must be raised for proper usage. He says that these are only two of the many medicines used for this purpose.

The Azande of the Bahr-el-Ghazal use the small yellow fruit of a wild tomato, *gbakatuna*, which they squeeze, or the twigs of the *yudepia* tree, which they grate with a knife on to the table.

Then they take the head of the *iwa* and dip it into a gourd of water and apply its flat bottom to the table-top of the *iwa*. The moment the water touches the medicine squeezed or grated on the table, it causes it to froth and bubble violently.

This is the moment for usage. The operator sits down with his legs bent and his right foot resting on the handle or tail of the instrument to keep it steady whilst he uses his right hand to take the head of the *iwa* between his thumb and first finger, firmly, and to make a few preliminary jerks which send the head slithering easily over the table. The question is now put by the operator to the oracle. He taps *iwa* on the head and says, perhaps:—

" <i>iwa</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>akpi</i>	<i>gi</i>	<i>gana ?</i> "
" <i>iwa</i>	I	will die	this	year ? "

He then makes short jerks with his right hand, and the lid will either slither easily over the table of the *iwa*, in which case the answer is "No, you will not die this year," or the lid will stick, and no amount of similar jerks will remove it, and it has eventually to be pulled upwards with considerable force, in which case the answer is "Yes, you will die this year." That is to say, that if the lid sticks the answer is in the affirmative; if the lid does not stick but slides easily, the answer is in the negative.

Or the little lid may run about from side to side and round and round instead of going straight forwards and backwards. This means that the oracle is uncertain: "*Si na ka ka*" they say.

Strictly speaking, as in *benge* or in *dakpa*, a second and confirmatory trial should be made. In this case he will ask, if the lid has stuck in the first trial signifying that the answer to the question "Will I die this year?" is "Yes," the question again in a negative form. "It is untrue, I will not die this year?" The wood runs smoothly backwards and forwards giving the confirmatory verdict of "No," that is, "No, it is not untrue you will die this year." Just as in *benge*, if the first hen dies then the second hen must live, or *vice versa*, if the first hen lives then the second hen must die, for the verdict to be valid; so in *iwa*, if the first jerks with the lid result in sticking, then the second series of jerks must run smoothly backwards and forwards, and, conversely, if the first series of jerks make the lid run smoothly, then the second series of jerks must result in a sticking of the lid, for a valid verdict.

Strictly speaking, this is the correct procedure, but in daily use one of the oracles is generally held to be sufficient and the next question is then asked. This omission of the second part of the oracle is partly due to the fact that in all very important matters the confirmation of *iwa* is sought by *dakpa* and by *benge*, and partly owing to the fact that the second trial invariably upholds the verdict of the first trial for a reason soon to be given.

Thus, in contrast to the lengthy processes of *benge* and *dakpa*, *iwa* gives the oracle in a few seconds, and a large number of questions dealing with a variety of subjects can be answered quickly in succession.

There will often be two or three persons near by when the *iwa* is being consulted and each will take the opportunity of consulting the oracle about their affairs. One will want to know who has been using witchcraft against him resulting in a sore foot, another who has been

preventing him from killing animals by witchcraft, another who has been using the same malign power to hinder his wife from having children ; for *iwa* is " par excellence " the oracle for discovering the *boro mangu*, or witch. Marriage affairs, journeys, illness and many other matters will similarly be asked.

Whatever questions a man wishes to put subsequently to the oracle, generally he will, as a matter of course, begin by asking : *mi akpi gi gana* ? (I will die this year ?) or simply *mi akpi* ? (I will die ?) Such a question has a traditional technique of its own. The operator plucks a few blades of grass and makes with them a circle in the air, just above the earth, to indicate a grave to the *iwa*, and then casts the grass behind him, before working the magical instrument.

At this point I had better draw attention to the fact that the *sima* is not always spoken to the instrument directly. When the man who is manipulating the instrument wishes to address it he taps it on the head and asks it the question. Often, however, the man who is manipulating the instrument will not address the *iwa* which hears the question put by the enquirer to the manipulator. On the other hand the manipulator will often make a long address to the *iwa*.

I will now give an example of a consecutive series of questions concerning the same affair, which were asked at an oracle consultation at which I was present.

The wife of Zingbondo, the son of Bagbe, both father and son being chief's deputies, wished to consult *iwa* about her daughter, who had refused to marry her espoused husband, had been beaten by her father for this obstinacy, and had, much to her mother's anxiety, run away from home and had not been seen for two or three days. The first question put to the *iwa* was, " Is the girl dead ? " The lid went smoothly backwards and forwards giving the answer " No. " She next asked, " Has the girl gone to stay with relatives ? " The lid stuck and refused to move to the operator's jerks, thus giving the answer " Yes. " She next asked, " Shall I go and try to find her ? " The *iwa* answered " No. " Her last question was, " Will she return home within three days ? " The lid stuck, giving " Yes " as an answer. The oracle was consulted in the afternoon and the girl came back to her mother the same evening.

This example gives us an excellent illustration of the somewhat wide questions put to the *iwa*. Having been informed by the oracle

that the girl had run away to her relations, I suggested we should ask it which relations, giving the names in turn of those who lived near. I was, however, informed that this was an improper question to ask *iwa* and that the oracle could not be expected to know the affair in such detail.] In the same way no native would have asked *iwa* whether the girl would return to her mother to-morrow. They will always ask a question of this nature to within two or three days. I have seen a large number of *iwa* oracles, and when I was able to follow the questions in the native language I found that they were always of this general wide nature. I used to test this opinion by asking straightforward narrow questions, such as the native does not ask. For example: "Will it rain to-morrow?" or "This afternoon I am going to see the chief Gangura, will I find him at home?" or "I am going out shooting to-morrow, will I kill meat?" The answer to these questions was usually, "I do not know," that is, the head of the *iwa* went from side to side and round in circles; whereas if I asked a general question, such as the native always asks, I invariably received a straightforward oracle of "Yes" or "No," and usually the subsequent event proved it to be a correct one. It must be remembered that unless the questions were put in a stereotyped form, as in *benge*, the oracle would lose its social utility.

THE PROBLEM OF CHEATING.

I have not the slightest doubt that the operator of the *iwa* cheats. Firstly the second confirmatory oracle, unlike *benge* and *dakpa*, invariably supports the previous verdict. This, in itself, is convincing enough. Moreover, the answers are always given in accordance with the findings of a reasoned consideration of the questions asked; that is to say that the *iwa* answers "Yes" or "No" just as I should have answered when, knowing all the relevant facts, I had made a decision on the grounds of probability. I used to test this when watching the oracle upon many occasions by making a quick judgment on the grounds of probability and by seeing whether the oracle agreed with my conclusions.

Also, having learned to use the instrument, I have discovered that it is possible to regulate the movements of the lid on the table-surface of the *iwa* by means of pressure and the manner of jerking the lid in such a way as to make it go round or from side to side or straightforward or stick firmly. Such cheating is beyond detection by the observer.

Now, if the operators do intentionally cheat it must be borne in mind that they do not cheat themselves but other people, which, of course, is quite a different matter. Only a small percentage of the population are possessors of the *iwa* and, though they may oblige their friends by consulting the oracle free, they may normally expect a small payment before they begin to operate the instrument. If this small source of income is to be kept, their *iwa* must have a local reputation for the correctness of its oracles, and I am convinced that the owners regulate the oracles in accordance with a reasoned judgment of what will in all probability happen.

At the same time I should not like to say how far this "cheating" is "unconscious," that is how far the nervous jerkings of the instrument, held between the thumb and forefinger, and the mental reaction in the mind of the operator to the question which he has just heard, work in concord without the intermediate mental process (as "I must make the lid stick") corresponding with the purposive manipulation of the instrument. This is a very difficult problem. I believe that the owner of the *iwa* also consults it about his own affairs.

Naturally the question of cheating is a very interesting one and I made many enquiries into it. The observer will soon realise that such oracles as *iwa* which function directly through human agency and still more those oracles, not described in this paper, in which man himself or the spirits are the source of inspiration, have a place in native culture far below the greater oracles which function through non-human agency, such as *benge* and *dakpa*.

To what extent does this cultural arrangement of the oracles in order of merit correspond with the individual's outlook? Every Zande will tell you that *iwa* is in no way reliable, like *benge* and *dakpa*. It has to give so many oracles and sometimes an *iwa* will make mistakes. They will also all admit, if asked directly, that some operators cheat but that no good operator will cheat and if a man did so his *iwa* would not tell him the truth and no one would go to it for an oracle. Their answer amounts to no more than that they know that it is possible to cheat but that people do not normally do so. Their reaction to the question is quite different from their shocked negative to the question whether a man would cheat with *benge*.

But only some *siwa* (plural of *iwa*) make errors, others will always be correct. The correctness of an *iwa* depends upon the instrument not becoming cold (*sele*)—(that is, lose its magic), and upon the operator possessing correct magic to enable him to operate the instrument successfully.

If a man's *iwa* makes many mistakes he will realise that it has become "cold," and, being *sele*, has lost its magic. This may be due to the breaking of one of the food or sex taboos, or it may be due to the operation of the *iwa* too often with women looking on, but generally this "coldness" of the instrument is attributed to *mangu* (Black Magic or witchcraft), that malign influence by which all man's cultural ends and ambitions are likely to be thwarted. However, in this instance the injury can be remedied, the "coldness" removed, and the magic rehabilitated.

They take the *iwa* and place *ngwa iwa* (medicine of *iwa*) between the lid and the table-surface, and they bind it round with barkcloth. They dig a hole in the path along which people are often passing, or better still at the cross-paths, and place the *iwa* in the hole and cover it up with earth and smooth down the place so that no one will see that a hole has been dug there. Before covering the *iwa* they address it, saying "You are *iwa*; why do you lie? tell the truth." The many persons who pass unwittingly over the instrument remove the "coldness." If a man is aware that the *iwa* lies buried he will go round the spot and not over it, since he does not wish to take part of the "coldness" on himself.

After two days the owner will dig up his *iwa*, and having burnt some *benge* in the fire, he rubs the soot of it on the *iwa*, so that it may tell the truth just as *benge* tells it, and he addresses to the instrument the *siwa* or spell, thus :—

"*iwa mu gumba lengo nu benge.*"

"*iwa you speak truth with benge.*"

He then puts some fresh *benge* on the table-surface, binds it up with barkcloth, and places it under the verandah of his hut for five days. After this the magical instrument may be expected to work properly and to tell the future or past correctly.

I believe that this method of burying the *iwa* is also used sometimes, either alternately or complementary to—I am uncertain which—observation of the food and sex taboos whilst carving out the instrument with an adze and drying it in the sun.

MAGIC OF WORKING THE ORACLE.

A man cannot expect the *iwa* to tell the truth unless he has himself received the proper magic to operate it. For, unlike *benge* and *dakpa*, a man must first have acquired the magic to operate the oracle successfully. Here, again, it may well be pointed out that the oracles do not in themselves possess the virtue of telling hidden matters, but that *iwa* only acquires such virtue through the observance of the full ritual restrictions, through adherence to the traditional usage, and through the possession by its operator of the right magic.

A man who wishes to operate the *iwa* will therefore first buy the magic from some man who possesses it, probably from a *binza*, or professional magician. The owner of the medicine will place some of it in a small pot and bring it to the boil, in oil, over a fire. Whilst it is boiling he will utter the spell. He repeats over and over again the name of the man who wishes to buy the magic, and makes movements over the pot with the thumb and forefinger of his right hand as though he were operating the instrument *iwa*. He addresses the magic in the pot with much repetition and variation on the following theme:—

<i>ngwa</i>	<i>nga</i>	<i>mo</i>	<i>ngwa</i>	<i>iwa</i>	<i>nga</i>	<i>mo</i>	<i>mo</i>	<i>gumba</i>
magic	are	you	magic	<i>iwa</i>	are	you	you	speak
<i>lengo</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>gumba</i>	(<i>limo ho</i>	<i>nga</i>	<i>liwe</i>) ¹	<i>liwe</i>	<i>mu</i>	
truth	speak	name	its	is	<i>liwe</i>	<i>liwe</i>	you	
<i>gumba</i>	<i>lengo</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>gumba</i>	<i>banzua</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>gumba</i>	<i>lengo</i>	
speak	truth	speak	<i>banzua</i>	you	speak	truth		
<i>a</i>	<i>gumba</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>gumba</i>	<i>unzunzu</i>	<i>kara kara</i>	<i>mu</i>		
speak	you	speak	correctly.	it	boils.	you		
<i>gumba</i>	<i>unzunzu</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>gumba</i>	<i>lengo</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>gumba</i>		
speak	correctly	you	speak	truth	speak			

The recipient of the magic now pays a half-piastre or a piastre or a small ring or a small knife, which is dropped into the pot.² Without this payment the operations cannot be continued, as the pot will break and the magic will be lost. The purchaser then begins to stir and to utter the spell over the magic in a similar manner. As in all such magic amongst

¹ An explanatory interpolation by my informant. *Liwe* and *banzua* are two of the medicines in the pot.

² It is a very common feature of Zande magic that the payment is part of the traditional procedure, having its set place in the sequence of the ceremony.

the Azande stirring of the magic (*i na woraha*) in oil is a very important part of the proceedings, and when magic is being paid for the payment precedes the privilege of being allowed to stir the magic and utter the spell.

When it has boiled for some time the unabsorbed oil on top is poured off into a gourd or leaf-cup and the solid part of the mixture remains in the pot. The owner of the magic now takes the oil which has been drawn off and rubs the purchaser's hands with it, and also his own hands and the hands of any other person present who has in the past received the medicine. They all drink some of the oil from a little leaf-cup, and finally he rubs the *iwa* with the oil.

If he is a *binza* or professional magician, the owner of the magic will possess a horn of waterbuck or hartebeeste, or of some other large animal of the bush, which is filled with a black paste composed of roots of plants and oil. He takes a long spoon-stick into the black medicine, and drawing some of it out, mixes it with the magical substance in the pot and then eats some of it himself and gives some to the purchaser to be eaten from the spoon drawn across his mouth.

The main part of the ceremony now commences. The owner of the magic takes his knife from its sheath and makes incisions with the point on the right hand and right foot, near the big toe, of the purchaser, for these parts of the body come into contact with the *iwa*. He makes incisions in his left foot, since he may meet with evil influences on the path before operating the instrument. Into these incisions he rubs a little of the medicine from the pot, as also into the table of the *iwa*. He himself will also take the opportunity of making fresh incisions in his own hand, and so also will any persons who have been through the ceremony in the past and who wish to take the opportunity to absorb fresh magic. They then eat the remainder of the magical substance.¹

(5) (b) ANALYSIS OF THE MAGIC.

An analysis of the *iwa* oracle-magic shows us a similar structure to those of *benge* and *dakpa*.

- (1) TABOO.—The food and sex taboos must be observed during the making of the instrument and prior to its use. A breach

¹ The purchaser only receives magic of the *iwa*. He is not taught the composition of the medicine, for which he would have to make a large payment.

of these taboos will destroy the power of the magic, which can then be resuscitated only by a new and complete magical process.

- (2) TRADITIONAL PROCEDURE.—The traditional technique and order in working the oracle must be upheld. The correct medicine must first be given to the *iwa*, it must be addressed in the stereotyped phraseology of the oracle; the traditional interpretations must be adhered to.
- (3) SOCIAL CONTEXT.—The social setting in which the consulting of the augury *iwa* plays its part as a preliminary to certain social acts. This is to be discussed presently.
- (4) The operator must have taken the proper magic to enable him to manipulate the oracle.

Iwa is not itself an owned magic. On the contrary, the taboos, the traditional procedure, the *sima*, many of the medicines for placing on the oracle table, are known to all. But the medicine of the operator is known only to a limited number of men, and its use must be bought by a small payment. Once more there is an actual sex division in the use of the magic, women being acquainted with it but not using it.¹

6. (a) DESCRIPTIVE ACCOUNT OF THE MAPINGO ORACLE.

There are as many means of telling hidden affairs in which man is the agent, such as the medicine-men and men in whom the spirits of the dead dwell, as there are means in which some external agent is the oracle-giver, but they are outside the scope of the paper.

There are also several machine-oracles little used amongst the Azande such as the *makama* and the *doma* fruit, the former being part of the equipment of the *binza* or medicine-man, which we will not describe here. Also we shall here pass over the oracles which are in use amongst the Azande who border on foreign lands, such as those employed by the Baka, Moro, Bellanda and other tribes.

The only other oracle which we shall describe in this paper is the *mapingo*. The *mapingo* is so simple that it is widely used, either to enquire into small matters or more especially as a preliminary to one of the greater oracles. Women use the oracle much and even children make it to enquire into their little affairs. Lagae says "Les Azande ne

¹ One woman in Ngere's country is said to use it. See page 23.

pratique pas le *mapingo*, très en honneur chez les Mangbetu et les Abarambo," but it is in common usage amongst the Azande of the Bahrel-Ghazal.

All the machinery needed are three little pieces of wood, about half an inch long and with rounded sides, from the *bilikpa* tree (the oracle is sometimes called *bilikpa*) or the *badangi* tree, or the magical tree *doma*, or the magical tree *zelengbonde*, or the homely vegetable *gbanda*. If there is only one question to be asked, three small pieces of wood are sufficient, but if there are two problems, then six pieces will be required, and so on. But one of these trees always grows near the homestead and no trouble is expended in providing the material of the oracle. The consulter takes the little pieces of wood and places them, two, side by side, as a base, and the third piece resting on the other two. He then addresses it

<i>bilikpa</i>	<i>nga</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>du le.</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>akpi</i>	<i>gi</i>
<i>bilikpa</i>	are	you	here	I	will die	this
<i>gana</i>	<i>si</i>	(a) <i>gbata</i>	<i>ka</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>akpinga</i>	<i>te si</i>
year	it	will scatter	I	will not die	it	
<i>ra</i>	<i>uru</i>	<i>za</i>				
remains	sun	in position.				

The oracle is consulted in the evening just before nightfall, and the little wooden piles, in number according to the number of questions asked, remain in a clearing at the edge of the hut-space bordering the garden, till morning comes. If during the night something has scattered the pieces of wood so that the little piled-up structure has fallen, then, if addressed as above, the answer is "You will die this year." But if the night has passed without the little sticks having fallen from their previously arranged position, then the answer is "You will not die this year."

6. (b) ANALYSIS OF THE MAGIC.

As the oracle conforms in its structural characteristics to the characteristic form of *benge*, *dakpa* and *iwa*, we may condense the analysis.

- (1) TABOO.—*Mapingo* must be carried out under the observance of sex and food taboos.
- (2) TRADITIONAL PROCEDURE.—It must be made with the usual woods proper to the oracle and must be carried out in the

stereotyped manner and time with *sima* and method of interpretation.

(3) SOCIAL CONTEXT.—It has its social milieu (see pp. 37 ff).

It is like *benge* and the other oracles in that it is "unowned magic." It is known to all. No expenses are involved and there is no sex bar to use.

7. GENERAL ANALYSIS OF ORACLE-MAGIC.

We have described four methods by which the Azande discover matters hidden to man. We have tried to show what the Zande thinks and does in the many peculiar occasions which arise from the natural workings of the oracle. We have tried to estimate his trust in the various forms of oracle and to show how the plasticity of the rites maintains his confidence in, and upholds the social utility of, the magic.

We have seen that none of these oracles have magical powers in themselves, neither the scraped and dried roots of the *benge*, nor the wooden instrument *iwa*, nor termites, nor the three sticks of the *mapingo*, but that they exercise their magical powers only as a result of man's abstinence and knowledge of tradition.

We have remarked that the oracle-magic is not owned magic, but that knowledge of *benge*, *dakpa*, *iwa* and *mapingo* is known to all or can be learnt without payment. All adult Azande know what taboos they must keep, and how to manipulate, address and interpret the oracles. In *iwa* alone is there a slightly different connotation, for in *iwa* there is a special magic in which lies success in using the oracle, and that can only be acquired by purchase. But this is a quite separate magic from that of the oracle itself.

We have noticed that the morphological structure of all these oracle magics is the same, that they all depend for their virtue upon knowledge of the correct implements, upon their being carried out under taboos, and in the traditional sequence and manner of use, upon the *sima* or address being uttered to the magic in stereotyped phraseology and form, but not in fixed formulæ, and upon the findings of the oracle being interpreted in accordance with a definite set of rules.

We shall now see that the occasions of the consultation of the oracles are a social setting wherein the oracle has its special ceremonial place in the oracle of economic, legal, religious and social acts of everyday

life. We shall do this by first giving as briefly as possible two descriptive examples of the way in which one finds the oracles functioning in their social contexts and then by giving a condensed analysis showing the large range of economic and ceremonial acts with which the oracle-magic is associated and in which it plays its rôle.

8. SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF ORACLE-MAGIC.

(a) DESCRIPTIVE ACCOUNT OF FUNCTION.

I give the matrimonial history of Kamunga to show how *benge* plays its rôle in the social context of marriage, but I must point out that he was in my service and, consequently, far wealthier than the ordinary Zande who has not the means of becoming such a Don Juan.

Kamunga is about sixteen years of age. When I met him first he had been married for about two years to a girl, called *Nabani*. *Benge* had in the *bambata sima* agreed to the marriage, and for some reason the *gingo* had been postponed. Nabani had only lived with Kamunga for a few months during these two years, because her brother (her father was dead) would not let her remain permanently with her husband, but had exacted many presents from him upon the promise that Nabani would shortly take up residence with him as a permanent union. In this way he had exacted from Kamunga clothes, a box, tin cooking vessels and other articles of trade. When Kamunga became impatient and asked his wife's brother why his wife had not come to join him, he replied that he had consulted *benge* in the belated *gingo*, and that it had said that Nabani would die if she went to live at Kamunga's home at Yambio.

Kamunga now entered my service and changed his residence and demanded his wife. Her brother said that he had twice consulted *benge* with reference to new addresses, and still *benge* said that his sister would die.

Whilst affairs were in this impasse Kamunga decided to take another wife, Nalihe, daughter of Bambina, in the district of Bagomoro (Place of Hunger), where we were then living. The consultation of *benge* with regard to this marriage has been referred to already in this Paper.

- (1) *Benge* spared the first fowl, and the second fowl was also spared in the oracle but died later in Kamunga's home. The verdict was, therefore, considered as invalid (see p. 18).

- (2) *Benge* was again consulted and killed the first fowl and spared the second fowl, thus consenting to the marriage. But the belated death of the fowl in the first oracle made Kamunga nervous, and he decided to ask *benge* again (see pp. 18 and 19).

Such was the position when Kamunga and I went to stay in the neighbourhood of the homestead of Nabani, his first wife. Nabani's brother tried to extract more gifts from Kamunga, which he would have given had I not, unwisely, as an anthropologist, forbidden him to do so. I suggested he should consult *benge* again, but he said that this was quite useless, as *benge* was quite clear in its verdict against the marriage. Kamunga said that he would himself consult *benge*, and the brother of his wife agreed to let his sister live with her husband for a few days. At the same time the brother of Nalihe, his second wife, came to see him, so that he had the opportunity of consulting *benge* about both marriages.

- (1) *Benge*, by sparing the first fowl and killing the second fowl, once again reiterated its refusal to the marriage. Kamunga was very upset, but as Nabani was unwell at the time he feared that she might die whilst living with him, and next morning he sent her home for good and demanded the return of his twenty spears.
- (2) *Benge* agreed to his marriage with Nalihe, his second wife, by killing the first fowl and sparing the second fowl. The marriage to Nalihe was thereupon confirmed and settled. Kamunga was thus left with one wife, and about three weeks later he decided to take in marriage another girl whose name I forget, but whom we will call No. 3.
- (1) *Benge*, on being consulted, spared both hens, and its verdict was invalid. A taboo had been broken and *benge* was *zele* (cold).
- (2) On another day, *benge* was again asked, and killed the first hen and spared the second hen, thus consenting to the marriage. Kamunga paid eight spears to the girl's father and became affianced to the girl.

Wife No. 1, Nabani, has returned to live with her brother, and Kamunga is trying to regain his other thirteen spears. Wife No. II, Nalihe, is now living happily with Kamunga. Wife No. III had not, on my departure from the country, yet come to live with her husband.

Before we go on to describe a second example of the social rôle of the oracle, there are a few points in the above account which require elucidation. Firstly, we see how *benge* acts as a legal force in giving validity to the bond of marriage. I have heard discussion on marriage in which the parents have been trying to regain their daughter—not all the spears having been paid—but in which the husband points out the fact that *benge* has definitely consented to the marriage as his strongest argument for his retention of the girl. *Benge* acts as a binding force to the social contract of marriage. Conversely, as in the case of Kamunga's first wife, where the oracle has not been completed, the girl's guardian is able to keep her at home and exact presents from her husband. I may add that there is no ceremonial of marriage amongst the Azande.

Secondly, we see another means by which the oracle allows the native to elude its findings without breaking any traditional rule. He may take the girl to his home upon the verdict of the *bambata sima* and indefinitely postpone the *gingo*. Also in the *sima* they will always mention the place of the husband's home, so that if the *benge* declares against the marriage, they can consult it again on the grounds that change of residence alters the circumstances which were mentioned in the original *sima*.

Thirdly, it appears that the Zande is not above saying that he has consulted the oracle and has a verdict for or against the marriage, when he has never asked *benge* at all. It is therefore thought better either for both parties to consult the oracle or for a representative of one party to watch the oracle of the other party.

In the case just considered we have described the function of *benge* in the most important of human social bonds, those of marriage. This is a clear matter-of-fact reality. In the second example which we shall give we shall describe the function of *benge* in a case outside actuality, but in the realms of emotional life.

I was staying in the homestead of a blind and aged man, named Gami, an important chief's deputy. During one of the public dances and séances given by the medicine men of the district, one of the medicine men said that he saw by his magic that Gami would die this year, and that his death would be due to his wives, who wanted to be rid of him. News of this declaration was brought in the evening to the old man, who at once consulted *iwa* as to which wife was trying to kill him by *mangu* (witchcraft).

This is as far as I followed the affair, but as it was known to the natives I had no difficulty in receiving an account as to what would happen in the future. Gami will consult *dakpa* and *benge* to check *iwa*'s accusation of his wife.

If *dakpa*, and later, *benge* support *iwa*, then he will consult *iwa* as to who shall inform his wife. He will also ask *benge* whether his wife stands alone in this matter, or whether there is someone behind her. If she stands alone, he will enquire whether he will live if his wife blows water (the Zande method of counteracting witchcraft).

We suppose that *benge* says "yes" to these questions, that his wife stands alone, and that he will live if she blows water. The friend, an elderly man, chosen by *iwa*, now goes with the *sve kondo* (chicken's wing)¹ on the end of a stick, and places it on the ground in front of her. He tells her that *benge* says that she is injuring her husband and that she must show her goodwill by blowing out water from her mouth on to the wing of the fowl. As she does this, she says: "If indeed there is *mangu* (witchcraft) in me, then may it be cooled." When she has blown the water on to the wing of the fowl, she tells the messenger to go back to her husband and say to him that he must consult the oracles again.

If after some days *benge* tells him that his wife is still injuring him with *mango*, the process is repeated. This may happen two or three times, and the woman will feel so miserable that she will go to a distant *bakumba*, or chief's deputy, and ask him to make an *gbo benge* or special test with the *benge*.

The *bakumba* will tell her to go home and after a few days he will either send to Gami to tell him that *benge* spared the fowl and that his wife is no longer acting against him, or he will send the wing of the fowl to the woman, showing that *benge* has killed the fowl and affirmed her guilt. In the former case the husband Gami will have to pay five spears to the *bakumba* for making the test, in the latter case the burden of payment will fall on the wife's relations.

We need not go into other aspects of this case than the use of the oracles. I have said that the story was outside the realm of actualities

¹ When any *benge* is finished, the consultant places one wing of the dead bird on the end of a stick. The feathers of the wing are spread out like a fan. He always takes this to his hut and, in the case of ordinary questions, it remains stuck between the grasses in the roof of his hut. In cases of witchcraft it is always sent to the witch to be dealt with as here described. In cases where the consultant of the oracle is not present at the oracle, the wing is sent to him to inform him of the verdict, as in the text on page 8.

and in the world of emotion. Old age, blindness, sexual impotence, and the youth of women are indeed facts from which spring the fear of death, jealousy of wives, suspicions of sons and neighbours, all the emotional setting in which our story is woven.

In the case of Kamunga we saw how *benge* acted as a binding force in the social contract of marriage. In the case of Gami we see also how *benge* acts as a legal force regulating the means by which an old man renews his hope and conquers his fear. *Benge* gives authority to each step he takes, decides who is the witch, whether she is alone, who shall go to her, will he die if she blows water, and makes the dangerous accusation of witchcraft into a socially controlled procedure at which no one can cavil. We see also how it calms the emotional unrest of man. Nothing is more restless, helpless and dangerous than a man racked with fear, doubt and hesitation, bound to engage himself in some activity to settle his fears but not knowing what form of activity will disperse them. But *benge* dictates to him his course of action along traditional and socially harmless lines and *benge* gives him an object upon which his emotional unrest can spend itself.

We shall shortly return to this point, when we will discuss the social function of oracle-magic, but first we must describe one aspect of *benge* which we have barely mentioned.

(b) BENGE AS LEGAL MACHINERY.

We have left the legal functions of *benge* till the end of our paper in order that the account may run consecutively with the other social functions of the oracles and because the *benge* oracle in cases of law presents certain peculiarities. We shall begin by giving a descriptive account of *benge* in its rôle of law, in the narrow sense in which we use the term in Europe, before we discuss its rôle of law in the wide sense of binding sanctions.

We have already pointed out that only a chief can make an official oracle in cases of civil and criminal dispute. Any Zande can, indeed, consult as many oracles as he pleases but he may not act against another man on their findings. His chief must first make an official test with the *benge*.

All that we mean by Courts of law, charges, counsel for prosecution and for defence, juries and verdicts are for a Zande summed up in the procedure of *benge*. The chief does not hear the case, he does not call

witnesses, he does not balance evidence nor pronounce the verdict. All these processes he leaves to *benge*.

We will describe what happens in one of the most serious and one of the most frequent civil actions in Zande society, the action against witchcraft. Now, to the Zande, disease, wounds, death are due not to natural causes but to the malign activities of "witchcraft" or to the power of "medicine." If a man dies he has been killed either by *mangu* (witchcraft) or by *ngwa* (magic). The oracles are consulted and *benge* will say that the dead man was a victim of *mangu*, whereupon his relatives prepare to avenge his death. But the highly complex and organised Zande society allow no one to take vengeance on his own initiative or on the initiative of his social group, but vengeance is directed along prescribed channels. For the relatives of the dead cannot act on their own *benge* verdict but will inform their chief, who makes an official test of the case with *benge*. If *benge* kills the first fowl and spares the second fowl then the *puta benge* will send his chief the wing as a sign of guilt and the chief will authorise the injured relatives to take revenge or accept compensation. The verdict of the oracle is checked eventually by the opening up of the stomach of the man and within *mangu* (witchcraft) will be discovered, either after the man has been killed in revenge, or in the event of compensation being accepted, then at his natural death.¹

I will give one more example for purposes of subsequent analysis. "A" says that "B" has committed adultery with his wife, and "B" denies the charge. "A" goes to the chief and upon "B" reiterating his denial, *benge* is left to decide which of the two is speaking the truth and which the lie. The loser will have to pay the expenses of the oracle, being a fee of 10 spears or even 15 spears to his chief.

I do not wish to discuss features of these cases which do not concern our subject of oracles.

Sometimes in the past a man or woman would drink the *benge* himself or herself instead of the fowls. My notes on this ceremony are incomplete, and I shall, on my return to Africa, obtain a first-hand account from a very intelligent native who himself underwent the ordeal. Meanwhile I shall rely very largely upon Lagae, his contributions to our

¹ Of course to-day the white man allows no killing in revenge nor payment of compensation. I have never seen a stomach opened to discover *mangu*, but it is still frequently done in secret.

account being easily marked by the tongue in which they were written. Says Lagae: " L'épreuve du *benge* se fait parfois directement sur un homme ou une femme, soit parce qu'ils contestent la réponse d'un augure véridique qui a proclamé leur culpabilité, soit, parce que le fait dont ils sont accusés est d'une gravité exceptionnelle. Cela dépend, en somme, de l'appréciation et de la sévérité du chef.

" Cette épreuve se fait comme suit. L'accusé s'assied à terre. On fait une préparation de *benge* plus diluée que s'il agirait d'une épreuve sur les poulets. Le *putabenge* prend une feuille, la replie pour en faire un godet, puise de jus de *benge*, environ cinquante centimètres cubes, sans y mêler la marc, et fait boire cette potion.

" Le *Sima benge* commence alors à interpellé le *benge*, en disant] *benge, benge*, qui est dans le ventre de cet homme, dévoile la vérité. Si cet homme est vraiment coupable, tuez le, qu'il tombe. Si c'est un mensonge, s'il n'est pas coupable qu'il survive, qu'il ne chancelle pas et] aille ramasser une à une les ailes de poule plantées à terre.

" Entretemps on a placé, à une distance de quelques mètres un nombre variable d'ailes de poule, ou même des bâtonnets. Selon la sévérité du chef, on en met un nombre que varie de dix à vingt, à une distance de quelques pas l'une de l'autre.

" L'accusé est tenu d'aller les ramasser. S'il chancelle et tombe au cours de cette opération, il est reconnu coupable. S'il réussit à ramasser le tout sans tomber, son innocence est claire et nette. Dans les deux cas, l'oracle est définitif.

" S'il tombe en proie à des conclusions, le chef a le droit de la faire achever sur place. Généralement il autorise les amis du coupable à l'emporter et à lui administrer un contre-poison, on utilise, à cet effet l'écorce du *kpoyo* pilée pour en dégager la victime. Le jus de l'écorce du *kpoyo* est, paraît-il, un vomitif. Si la victime parvient à rendre le *benge* assez rapidement, il a des chances d'échapper à la mort. On va également coucher la victime dans la vase, ayant soin de recouvrir tout le corps sauf la face. Ce procédé est jugé assez efficace par les indigènes. Néanmoins la mort est fréquente.

" Celui qui a résisté à l'épreuve du *benge* et n'a pas chancelé, conserve toute assurance. Sa palabre est bonne ; le *benge* n'a pas voulu le tuer. Il s'en va toutefois se coucher au frais, près d'une rivière, dans

un endroit vaseux, et y reste jusque dans la soirée. On n'omet généralement pas de lui administrer une potion de jus de *kpozo*, en guise de vomitif."

I will supplement this account with notes from the ceremony amongst Azande of the Bahr-el-Ghazal. I was told that a person would drink *benge* only in grave issues, such as adultery with the wife of a chief or plotting against the life of a chief with black magic. They first unwind the coils of the man's hair and ruffle his hair so that it all stands up. They then place a log of wood on the ground. The man drinks the *benge*, the *Puta benge* rings a bell, and then utters the *Sima* or address to the magic in the stomach of the man. They then throw the bell to a distance, and whilst they beat on the wood the man ran to pick up and return with the bell. His failure or success in doing this proved his guilt or innocence. If the man returned with the bell and later died there was apparently no redress, but my informants would not readily admit that such an event ever occurred. I was told that if the man was proved guilty he was usually hacked to pieces there and then by the chief's deputies, since the crime was a grave one. But I must add that I never found it of much value to enquire into past events, which it is impossible to observe to-day, since the native has only a limited interest in them.

There is a magic, *zelengbondo benge*, which can be used to influence *benge*. All my informants agreed that it is never used except in legal disputes or criminal actions. The magic is cooked in oil, and as the magician stirs it he says the spell :—

<i>zelengbondo</i>	<i>benge</i>	<i>nga mo i</i>	<i>sima</i>	<i>kondo</i>
magic	(of) <i>benge</i>	are you	they address	fowl
<i>tipa re pati</i>	<i>benge</i>	<i>yo i di gi</i>	<i>kondo</i>	
about me near	<i>benge</i>	in they take this	fowl	
<i>ti li mo li i di</i>	<i>ru u kura</i>	<i>a kura</i>		
in name my they	take you (<i>benge</i>)	it survives		
<i>ni wene sale i di gingo u ima a ima</i>				
with good for me	they take <i>gingo</i>	it dies	dies	
<i>ni wene sale</i>				
with good for me				

The magic is known to few, and is regarded by the Zande as Black Magic. Though it is powerful, I was told that it would not help a man in a case where he had, himself, to drink the *benge*, and my informant quoted the case of a *bakumba* who had sexual intercourse with one of the wives of the great chief Gbudwe (*d.* 1905). This man was known to possess the magic *zelengbondo benge*, but he died in the ordeal nevertheless.

Also there is always a danger of being discovered in using the magic where the oracle is giving its answers through fowls. The hen will show peculiar distress, and will keep on falling as though dead and then getting up again. Such behaviour may lead the *puta benge* to suspect that the magic *zelengbondo benge* was used by the accused to influence the *benge*. He will at once put the question to *benge* whether the accused has used this magic. If *benge* kills the fowl immediately, thus giving an affirmative reply, then the *puta benge* will inform the chief. I was told that death was the invariable punishment for tampering in this manner with the machinery of justice.

There are two points in this description to which attention must be drawn. Firstly, we must note the position of the chiefs in the *benge* context. Chieftainship amongst the Azande is very pronounced and, in consequence, we might expect to find, as we do, that the mould of society leaves its form on the institution of the *benge* oracle. Lagae says that in the past, so the Azande told him, *benge* was known only to the Avongara chiefs, and he commendably quotes his information :—

<i>gu</i>	<i>pay</i>	<i>nga</i>	<i>pa</i>	<i>benge</i>	<i>si</i>	<i>aenge</i>	<i>ti</i>
that	affair	is	affair	<i>benge</i>	it	originated	from
<i>hi na</i>	<i>agbiya</i>		<i>kungbwe</i>	<i>Azande</i>		<i>gbwa</i>	
only	chiefs		ordinary	Azande		just	
<i>i</i>	<i>ahinanga</i>		<i>pa</i>	<i>benge</i>	<i>mbata</i>	<i>te</i>	
they	did not know		affair	<i>benge</i>	before.		

This statement is probably incorrect. It is denied by all my informants, and Lagae himself adds "peut-on prendre cela a la lettre?" However this may be, the chiefs have a leadership in the *benge* magic. Only they can make an official test by the oracle, and for this they are paid ten spears, or sometimes fifteen spears.¹ The Zande chiefs, like

¹ To give some idea as to the value which this sum represents I will add that 20 spears is the normal number handed over in marriage in compensation to the parent of his bride.

other aristocratic possessors of the legal machinery, find "*justitia est magnum emolumentum*." On other occasions, such as in war or in public religious ceremonies, the chiefs consult the oracle officially. Moreover, the chiefs possess the actual material of the magic in far greater quantities than commoners, or even than chief's deputies. We have seen that either the chief organised the *benge* expedition into the Congo, or he was a part shareholder in the undertaking. There is no doubt that the special association of *benge* with chieftainship greatly enhanced the power of the Avongara.

The second point to which we shall draw attention arises from the white man's attitude towards the oracles. I have sometimes heard white men say, "but there is no justice in the *benge* method." We need not here enter into the ethics of justice, but one can re-state this criticism in another and more scientific form. What is the social utility of *benge* as legal machinery? It is true that the judgments of *benge* are always accepted as final, but if the evildoer and the righteous man stand an equal chance of civil and criminal conviction, however satisfactory in other respects the legal machinery of *benge* may be, it would hardly be socially useful, but the reverse. The answer to this difficulty is to recall a phrase already quoted, and which I have so often heard on Zande lips:—

<i>benge</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>gumbanga</i>	<i>zile te,</i>	<i>ga ani waraga do.</i>
<i>benge</i>	does	not speak	error	of us paper is

In our own society the guilty man can make a reasoned calculation that he always has a chance of escaping conviction, whereas no Zande would admit that the guilty had a chance of eluding conviction unless they possessed the magic of influencing the oracle. They will tell you, if you press the question, that a man who is clearly guilty is not such a fool as to allow the case to go to *benge*, as he will then have to pay, not only compensation to the party he has injured, but also the heavy court fees to the chief.

But we cannot dispose of the problem quite so easily because, if the Zande criminal knew that he had no chance of hiding his guilt, there would appear to be no reason for legal cases, whereas these are frequent. We must remember, however, that probably by far the greater number of cases concern black magic. Now, in these cases the accused naturally believes himself to be innocent, as witchcraft is probably never practised at all, and he is willing to make the *benge* test. What are the feelings of

an innocent man when *benge* denounces him it is difficult to say. If you ask him he will probably say, "If there is witchcraft, let it be cooled. I have no ill will. See I blow water. It is finished." I do not think the native is sceptical of the findings of *benge*; indeed, all the evidence goes to show that he is not. Men and women have been eager, not reluctant, to drink the magic themselves to show that they are not witches, or to cut open the stomachs of their beloved dead ones to prove that the family are not a family of witches, for witchcraft is hereditary.

The fewer number of cases concern such actions as adultery. Here the accused can have no doubt as to his own innocence or guilt. But if guilty and he agrees to the *benge* test, it must not be supposed that he is in any way sceptical about the oracle, for to think this would be to imagine that man's actions are based solely upon reason, which we all know by introspection and observation is not so. He emotionally rebels against submitting to punishment or death without a struggle and it is to this emotional reaction, and not to a reasoned scepticism, that we must attribute the contradiction between his beliefs and his behaviour.¹

LEGAL FUNCTIONS OF ORACLE-MAGIC.

We have already given consideration to the manner in which the oracles act not only to tell hidden matters and to give to man confidence in his undertakings but also to direct his activities into ordered social channels and to give sanction to activities which are binding on himself and others. We have shown in the case of Kamunga how the consultation of the oracle acts as a stabilising force on the bonds of marriage (see page 41). We have shown in the case of Gami how emotional unrest finds its outlet not in activity disruptive to society, but in a manner sanctioned by the social institution of the oracles. Indeed, in whatever instance we find the oracles at work we shall find that they not only act as passive informants but that they are active agents amongst the binding social sanctions which compose Zande law. I will give one more example of the manner in which the sanctions work and will then leave this aspect

¹ I have already pointed out in this Paper that we shall often find a mixture of rational opinion in conjunction with irrational beliefs, and I call attention again to another example here. I once asked a man, named Bagbiyo, a man considered by everyone as a witch, whether he was one or not. He indignantly denied the impeachment, and when I asked him how it was that his neighbours were always sending him the wings of the fowls killed by *benge*, in affirmative answer to the question "Is Bagbiyo using witchcraft against me?" he replied that the reason for this was that they always asked *benge* about him and not about other people.

because it requires discussion in connection with the entire range of Zande magic, which we do not attempt to describe in this paper. I have explained how the relations of a dead man act (page 45). They perpetrate what in another context is a heinous crime, killing a human being by magic. But in the context of death this is a pious and laudable action which they are compelled by social usage to undertake. If you ask a Zande whether the relatives of the man who is slain by magic will not take a similar line, he will reply that they can do nothing because *benge* had told the avenger that their relative was a witch and that the avengers could have acted in no other way than the way in which they did act. In this manner the oracle gives sanction to social acts.

SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF ORACLE-MAGIC.

This we regard as the most important aspect of our subject, but it is also the most difficult and the one in which we feel the least satisfaction in having attempted to elucidate. As the magic is practised in secret it is always difficult to find out which type of oracle would be used in any particular social context and its exact place in the sequence of events which form the contexts. We know, nevertheless, that oracle-magic forms the prologue to all the more important social, economic, legal and religious acts of a native's life. Without the oracle no economic work of magnitude can be started; no crisis in man's biological and social existence is unaccompanied by one or more forms of divination; no big religious ceremony would be held without first consulting the oracles; the oracle-magic forms the whole machinery of justice.

But since these oracles have their order and sequence in the complicated social structure of the Azande, so they should be described in relation to the activities in which they play their rôle. It is only in their full context in actual life that this function can be clearly demonstrated. But it is important to bring all these social occasions together into a condensed analysis to focus sharply the part which the magic plays in everyday life.

In the crisis of biological development, the "rites de passage" of life, one of the major oracles is always consulted. Before the birth of a child, both father and mother will consult *benge* and *dakpa* as to the dangers of delivery to mother and babe. Before the father takes the

step of giving a name to his infant, he will ask *benge* to assure him that it will live. Before the cutting of the foreskin in the circumcision ceremonies, sometimes a mortal operation, the boy's circumcision tutor, and, I believe, the father and the operator also, will consult *benge* whether the boy will survive the cutting. No man will ever enter upon the contract of marriage, nor will any girl's parents allow her to live with her husband, without first having consent from *benge*. No man will enter the secret society of *bili* without *benge's* assurance that he will pass safely through the rites of initiation. When sickness and pain threaten a Zande he will at first have recourse to *iwa*, *dakpa* and *benge* to discover who is injuring him with Black Magic, so that he may be cured and healed. When the cloud of death is hanging over him he will ask the oracle whether he will die. When a man has died his grief-stricken relatives will rely upon *benge* to tell them how he has died, so that they may be avenged, and later to assure them that vengeance has been made.

In the important economic undertaking of building a new homestead, a man will probably consult *mapingo*, *dakpa* and *benge* before he decides on a site. He will always consult the oracles before planting his main crop of *Telebun*, upon which he relies for his daily gruel and his beer, and often it will be necessary to find out by the same means who is responsible for the failure of any of his domesticated plants, so that he can arrange for the evil influence to be withdrawn. The Zande will ask *iwa* where he is to make his *gharia* or hunting-square, a task involving a great labour. Again, if his hunting is unsuccessful, he will have recourse to the oracles to know why.

In time of drought the chief will obtain advice of *benge* before he orders the solemn and communal ceremony of offering the first fruits upon the rocks to God.

In time of wars or migrations, the direction of advance, the day of fighting, the success of the venture, will all be foretold by the oracle-magic.

There are many other occasions of less moment upon which the oracles, particularly the lesser oracles, are consulted.

But the social contexts I have given, embodying as they do the main biological, social and economic activities of a Zande's life, sufficiently illustrate the function of oracle-magic in its social milieu.

In all the situations I have given the Zande must consult the oracles, not only to satisfy his own cravings, when doubt and hesitation shake his resolve and paralyse his actions, and, when his aims and ambitions are threatened by the dark cultural force of evil, black magic, which is for ever frustrating his designs, not only do the oracles give him assurance that he may proceed to his work and social ventures with confidence, but also they give him sanction or legal power to begin them.

For it is not only from choice, but from social compulsion, that he consults the oracles, and their dicta are for him binding social obligations.