

A DESCRIPTION OF DIVINATION AMONG THE SAKALAVA OF MADAGASCAR*

ROBERT W. SUSSMAN AND LINDA K. SUSSMAN

La divination est de tous les temps et de tous les peuples. Partout et toujours, l'homme, inquiet sur son sort, veut soulever le voile de l'avenir, comme aussi il veut percer l'obscurité du passé ou connaître le pourquoi des choses.^{1**}

The desire to know about events beyond the range of the senses has doubtless always existed. Such practices as fortune telling, mediumship, prophecy and divination have developed because of it, and with them, their techniques—from the use of crystal balls and playing cards to forked twigs and tea leaves.²

Man has always tried to learn about past and future events which affect his life and about problems over which he has no direct control. Divination is one of the many ways he has devised in his attempt to do this.

Divination is an integral part of the life and religion of the Malagasy people. Although it is now against the law, as are many traditional religious and medical practices, it is performed all over the island and is used in many diverse situations. The precise methods and means of interpretation, however, vary somewhat both between tribes and individual diviners. In this paper we shall describe the techniques used in Malagasy divination (*sikidy*) and some of the contexts in which it is performed. The description below is compiled from our own observations in the southwest of Madagascar (southern Sakalava tribe), and from those of Decary in the north-

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** "Divination is of all times and all peoples. Everywhere and always, man, concerned about his destiny, wishes to lift the veil of the future, as he also wishes to pierce the obscurity of the past or to know the why of things."

west (northern Sakalava tribe). Our observations were made in the village of Vondrove, near the Mangoky River, and those of Decary in Marovoay, southeast of Majunga. We shall point out some of the differences between the methods used in these two areas.

Divination is performed mainly in cases of sickness, in discovering the identity of thieves or in finding lost objects, in finding a wife, for advice about setting out on long journeys, for advice about crops or livestock, and in predicting future events. It is performed by a traditional doctor (*ombiasa*) in cases involving serious matters. However, many people know the techniques and perform divination themselves to solve minor everyday problems and to predict the future.

Traditional Malagasy religion is preserved mainly through the *ombiasas*. Although they are only part-time practitioners, they are highly prestigious and exert an immense amount of authority and influence over the people, who are willing to pay extremely high prices for their services. They are consulted for numerous reasons including religious rituals (e.g., circumcision and funerals), illness, and social and personal problems. They therefore exert authority not only in religious activities, but also in the social, medical, judicial, and personal spheres of life.

The Malagasy practice of divination by *sikidy* is thought to be of Arabic origin—as is the form of astrology practiced in Madagascar—and involves many Arabic terms. It is usually performed with the flat, oval, brown seeds of *Piptadenia chrysostachis*, a species of acacia. However, other types of seeds are reportedly used in some parts of the island where this particular species is rare. The procedure is quite complex: four columns of seeds are formed entirely by chance, eight more columns are derived from these according to precise rules, and new columns are sometimes derived from the twelve already formed. Deductions are then made about these configurations and result in the final interpretation. The following is a detailed description of the procedures used in *sikidy*.

DESCRIPTION OF SIKIDY

The diviner pours out all of the seeds, about 140 of them, which he usually keeps in a small sack. He then places a rock called *aramy* over a small fire. This gives off a resinous odor when burned. With his right hand he slowly mixes the seeds while he recites an incantation. Although the exact incantation varies from individual to individual, it always consists of certain elements: the diviner tells the seeds to wake up and to speak the truth for they know what man cannot know, and he names the founders of *sikidy* or describes how it originated. Decary (1970) reports some very long, elaborate incantations in which the place of origin and the circumstances under which *sikidy* was founded are described in detail and in which its

ancient origins are stressed. In the village in which we lived, however, the incantation was quite short and simple:

<i>Sikily*</i> , get up	Fohasikily
Wake up, do not play	Fohamaly, tsarafily, ka mikadokado
Speak the truth	Ka mivola raha tsy to
Walk in a straight line	Ka mikabeka be
Speak what you know	Ka mivola raha tsy tsire
If you are devious, you are alone	Lahavandy anao raiky
If you are truthful, we are together	Lahato antsika roa
<i>Sikily of Tsikiloly</i>	Sikilin'ny Tsikiloly
<i>Sikily of Lehimainte.</i>	Sikilin'ny Lehimainte.

It may be noted here that the term *sikidy* seems to refer to the method of divination, to the seeds used, and to a kind of personified spirit that knows what men cannot know. Colin (1959) reports that in addition to addressing the *sikidy* themselves, some diviners also address *Zanahary*, the Malagasy deity, and ask him to make the *sikidy* speak.³ The *sikidy* would then seem to act as a kind of liaison between man and god, or a means through which god can communicate with man.

After the incantation, the diviner randomly forms four small piles of seeds and places them before him from right to left (Figure 1). He counts by twos the number of seeds in the pile on the right. If there is an odd number of seeds in the pile, he takes one seed and places it before him; if there is an even number, he places two before him. He then determines whether there is an odd or an even number of seeds in the next pile to the left and takes out one or two seeds accordingly. The one or two seeds are placed underneath the seed(s) he drew from the first pile on the right. He follows the same procedure for the next two piles, from right to left. One column of four rows of one or two seeds is now formed. The basic pattern contains twelve such columns.

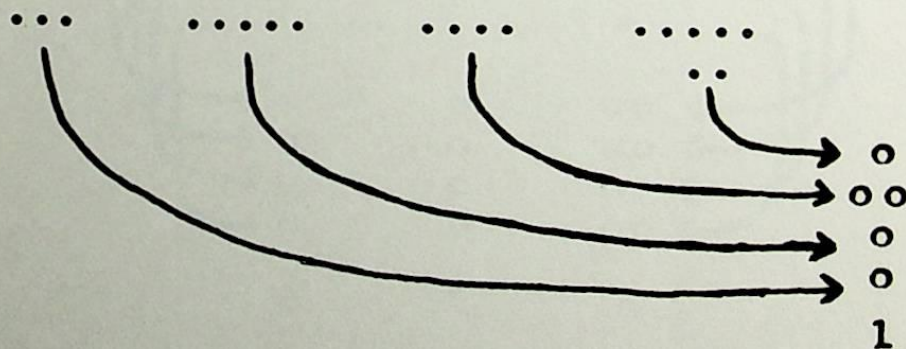


Figure 1. The formation of the first column.

* In the Southwest, the term *sikily* is used instead of *sikidy*.

The four small piles are then returned to the remaining seeds, with which they are again mixed together, and the procedure is repeated to form another column of four. This column is placed to the left of the first column. The procedure is repeated two more times until four columns have been completed (Figure 2). The unused seeds are then placed in a large pile.

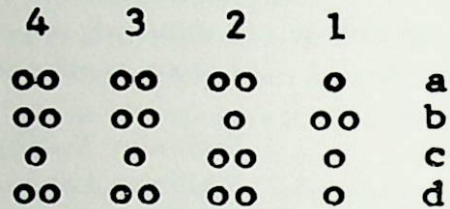


Figure 2. The first four columns, or "mother *sikidy*."

The first four columns, formed entirely by chance, are referred to by Decary as the "*sikidy-mère*," or mother *sikidy*: all of the succeeding columns are derived from them according to the following rules.

The fifth column is formed by adding the top row of seeds in columns 1 and 2 ($1a + 2a$). If the sum is even, place two of the unused seeds, and if the sum is odd place one, below and between these columns (Figure 3a). In the same way, add the second row of seeds in columns 1 and 2 ($1b + 2b$) and, according to the sum, place one or two of the unused seeds below the first row just formed. Follow the same procedure for the third and fourth rows of columns 1 and 2.

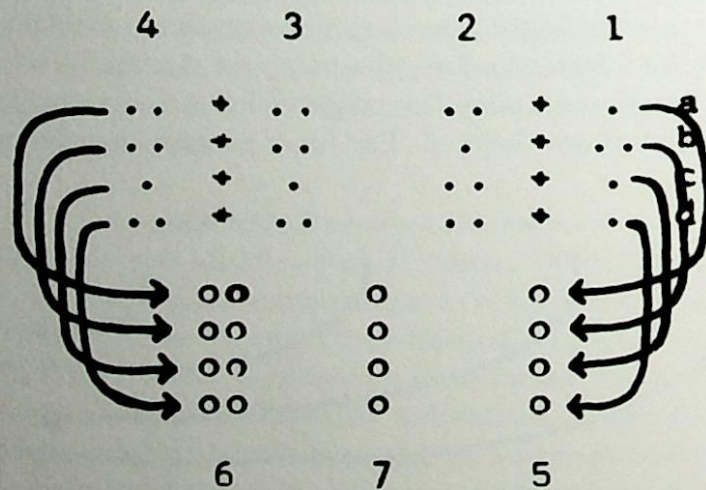


Figure 3a. Formation of columns 5 and 6.

The same process is repeated adding each row of columns 3 and 4 to produce a sixth column (Figure 3a). The seventh column is derived similarly by adding each row of seeds in columns 5 and 6 and is placed between these columns (Figure 3b).

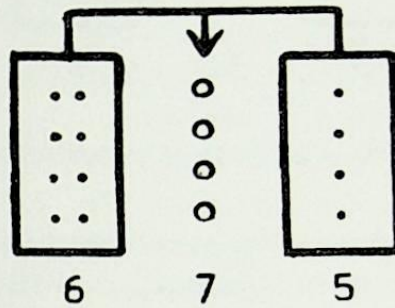


Figure 3b. Formation of column 7.

The eighth column is formed by adding, from right to left, each column of seeds in the first and second rows of the “mother *sikidy*” ($1a + 1b$, $2a + 2b$, $3a + 3b$, $4a + 4b$) (Figure 4a). It is placed to the left of column 6.

The ninth column is formed by summing each column in the third and fourth rows of the “mother *sikidy*” from right to left ($1c + 1d$, $2c + 2d$, $3c + 3d$, $4c + 4d$) (Figure 4a). It is placed to the left of column 8. Column 10 is derived by summing each row of seeds in columns 8 and 9 and is placed between them (Figure 4b).

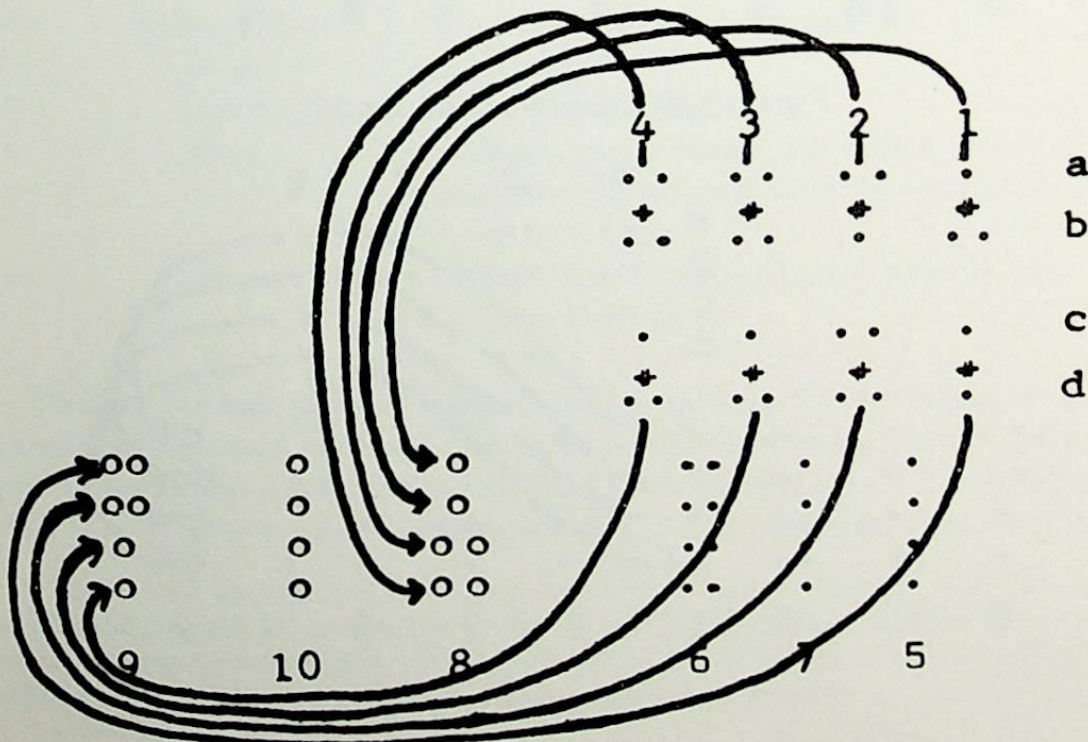


Figure 4a. Formation of columns 8 and 9.

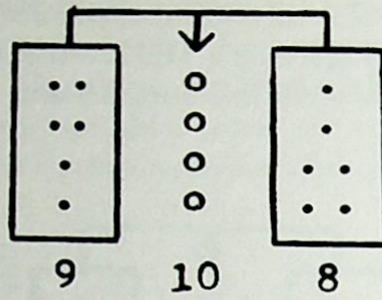


Figure 4b. Formation of column 10.

The eleventh column is placed between columns 6 and 8 and is formed by summing each row of seeds in columns 7 and 10 (Figure 5).

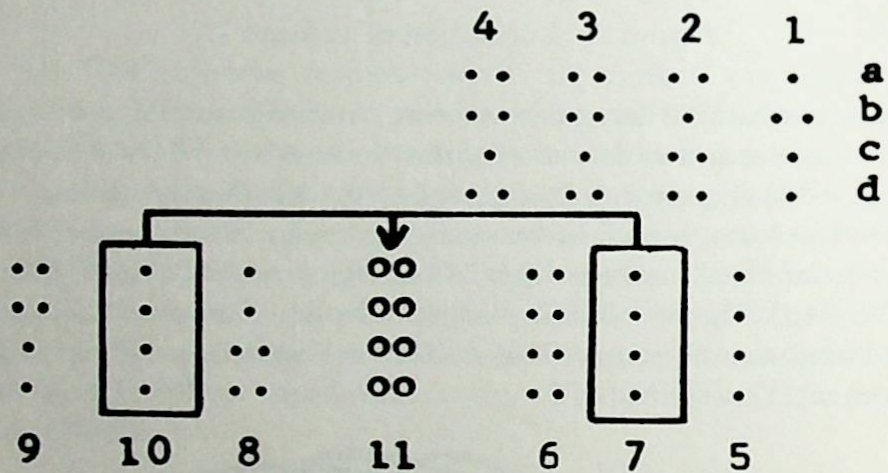


Figure 5. Formation of column 11.

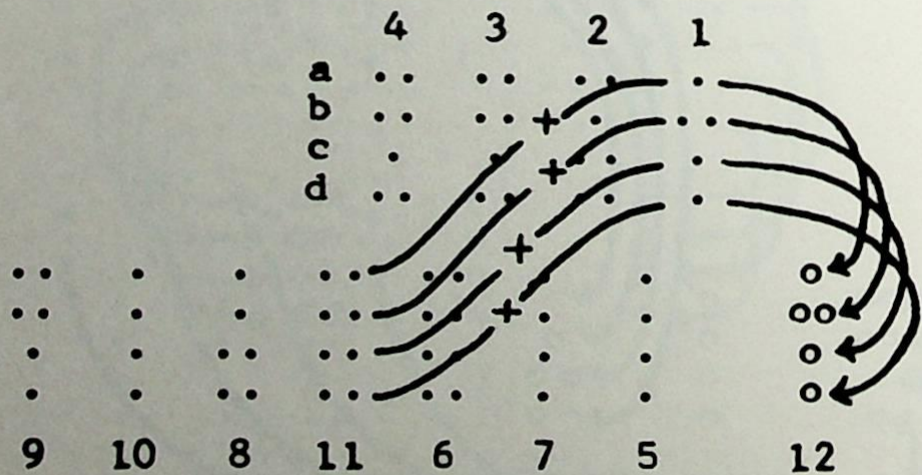


Figure 6. Formation of column 12.

The final column is formed by adding each row of seeds in the first and last columns (1 and 11). It is placed to the right of column 5 (Figure 6).

Each of the twelve columns of the *sikidy* signifies an object or person:

Column	Malagasy term	Object or person signified
1	<i>talé</i>	the client
2	<i>maly</i>	the object or situation in question
3	<i>fahatelo</i>	a man, thief, or caster of the spell on the client; literal translation: third
4	<i>bilady</i>	the earth, ground
5	<i>lalana</i>	the road, the path one must follow
6	<i>sohota</i>	father and/or mother (per Decary: trespasses; white men or masters)
7	<i>saily</i>	conversation, gossip (per Decary: people, inhabitants)
8	<i>haja</i>	food
9	<i>fahasivy</i>	the dead, ancestors (per Decary: someone closely involved with client); literal translation: ninth
10	<i>ombiasa</i>	the diviner, traditional doctor
11	<i>haky</i>	god
12	<i>ankiba</i>	house of the client or of a stranger

Each row of the "mother *sikidy*" also signifies something:

Row	Malagasy term	Object or person signified
a	<i>fianaha</i>	son or child
b	<i>manabily</i>	the question or problem
c	<i>alisay</i>	a woman—any woman, the wife of the man signified by column 3, or the woman one wishes to marry
d	<i>fahavalo</i>	accident, thief, enemy; literal translation: enemy and eighth

There are sixteen possible column configurations. Each is signified by a name, assigned to a cardinal direction, and ranked as either a slave or a prince (*andevon'ny sikidy* and *andrian'ny sikidy* respectively).^{*} The cardinal direction in which each configuration is found and the names of the

^{*} Our informant did not rank each figure as a slave or prince and took into consideration only the cardinal direction in which each item was found. We do not know, however, whether this was due to local variation or lack of knowledge on his part, since he was not an *ombiasa*.

configurations vary somewhat from region to region. Where we studied in the Southwest, they are signified as shown in Figure 7. Decary, however, reports that in the Northwest, *Alohotsy* and *Alakaosy* (in the West in Figure 7) are "migrators": they are in the East from sunrise to 10h, in the North from 10 to 15h, and in the West from 15h to sunset. They are never in the South since divination is not performed at night. (In some regions it is believed that mischievous spirits may interfere with the results if divination is performed at night.) In addition, the configurations named *Alikasajy* and *Aliaza* below are called *Betsivongo* and *Adimizana* respectively in the Northwest.

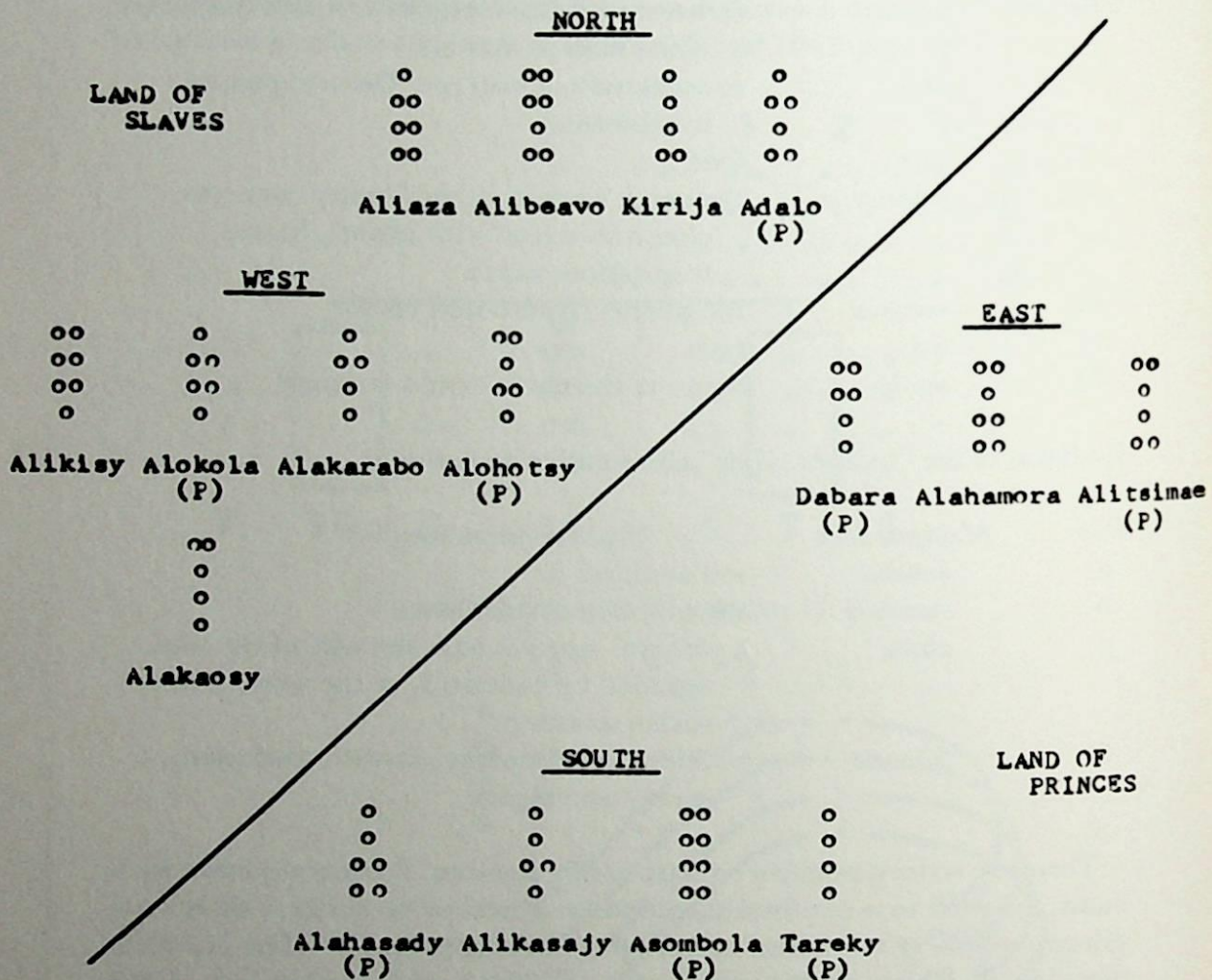


Figure 7. Names and locations of the 16 column configurations of *sikidy*.

Those configurations which are princes are designated by a 'P' in Figure 7. The South and East is referred to as the "Land of Princes" and the North and West as the "Land of Slaves." It can be seen that each configuration which holds the rank of prince consists of an even number of seeds, and it is interesting to note that the column signifying God (column 11, Fig. 6) must mathematically always contain an even number of seeds and, hence, be a prince. (Diviners usually make use of this rule to see quickly whether they have made any mathematical errors in deriving the bottom eight columns.)

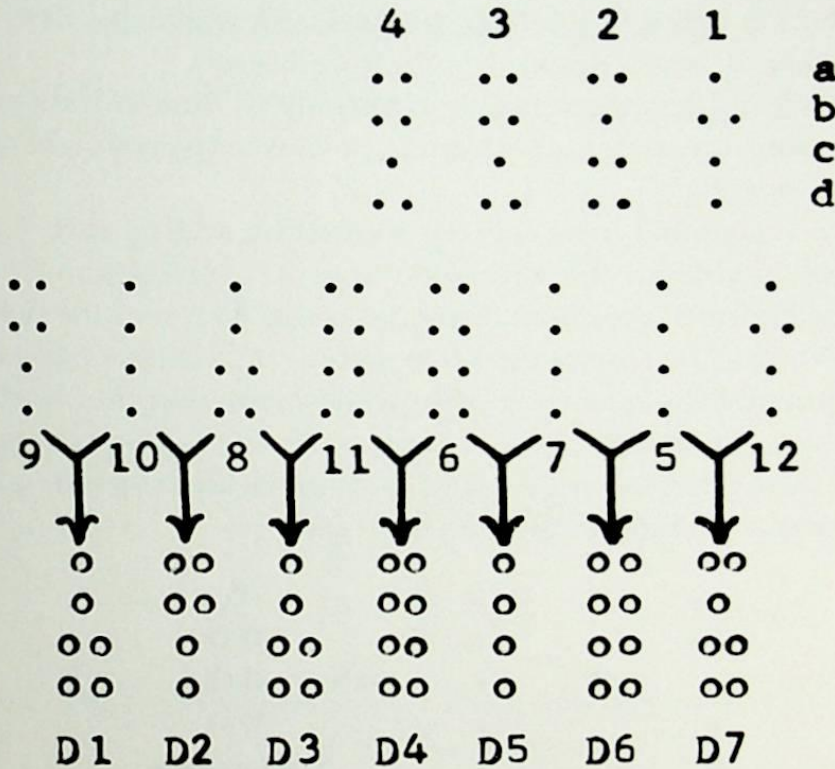


Figure 8. Formation of columns signifying days of the week.

The pattern resulting from divination is interpreted by considering the ranks of the items signified by each column and the cardinal directions in which they are found. Princes always dominate over and nullify the power of slaves. A battle between two princes is serious, if not mortal, but princes from the same territory are not detrimental to each other. In addition, a person or object from the Land of Princes is more powerful than one of the same rank from the Land of Slaves.

The particular problem of the client may require new columns, designating additional items, to be derived. For example, if one wishes to know what day one should make a journey, seven more columns, each signifying

a day of the week, are formed by adding each row of seeds in columns 9 and 10, 10 and 8, 8 and 11, 11 and 6, 6 and 7, 7 and 5, and 5 and 12 respectively (Figure 8). The first new column (D1) represents the present day, the next (D2) represents tomorrow, etc. The column of the same configuration as that of the client (column 1) is the day on which the event in question took place or should take place. If none of the seven columns is the same as column 1, the one the most similar to it (e.g., prince of the East, slave of the West) is the determined day.

There are many other reasons for deriving new columns. We shall, however, mention only a few, related to illness. The following description of divination about illness is drawn wholly from Decary.

The diviner considers three major factors about illness: 1. its gravity; 2. its cause: (a) punishment by superhuman powers or (b) poison or spells cast by men; 3. its remedy.

The illness is signified by a column formed by adding each row of the ninth column (the dead, the ancestors) and the first column (the client) (Figure 9). In Figure 9, the client is a slave of the West and the sickness is a slave of the North. They are of the same origin—the Land of Slaves—and so are not detrimental to each other. This would mean that the client will not die. If, however, the sickness were a slave of the East, the sickness and the client would be of different origins, and since the sickness would be from the Land of Princes, the client might very well die.

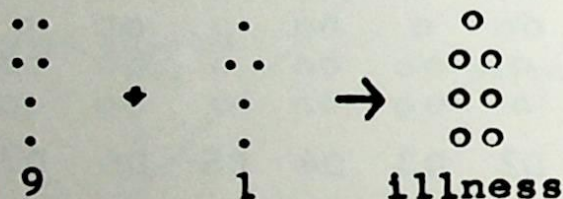
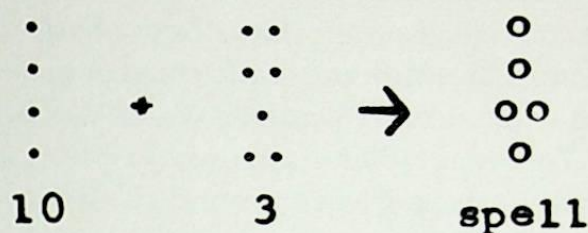


Figure 9. Formation of column signifying "illness."

The next step would be to determine whether the illness is caused by a spell or poison or whether it is caused by superhuman powers as a result of the client's breaking a promise or taboo. A spell is represented by a column formed by adding each row of column 10 (the diviner or traditional doctor) and column 3 (man, thief, caster of spell) (Figure 10). If the spell is of the same origin as the sickness or is more powerful than either the sickness or the client, the illness is caused by a spell. This is the case in Figure 10.

The eight columns in the lower portion of the *sikidy* pattern would then be divided into two groups (Figure 11). The resulting eight rows of four (rows e through l), from right to left, signify additional items (e.g., children



spell=slave of the South
 illness=slave of the North
 client=slave of the West

Figure 10. Formation of column signifying a spell.

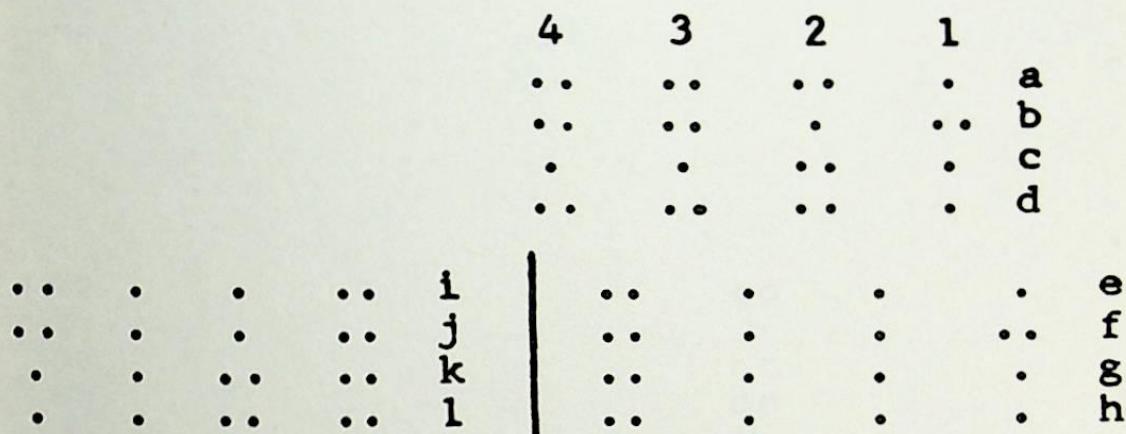


Figure 11. Eight rows signifying items involved in casting of spells or poisoning of food.

of other houses, women of other houses, field) that may have been involved in the casting of the spell or poisoning of the food.

Other columns signifying, for example, various types of foods which may have been poisoned may also be derived by combining various columns and rows. In this way, it would be possible to determine the person who poisoned the food, the food itself, the day the food was eaten, and the gravity of the illness. Similar procedures are used to obtain information about illnesses caused by superhuman powers as a result of broken promises or taboos.

OTHER USES OF SIKIDY

The *sikidy* are also used in making amulets and medicine horns. These are used for such purposes as ensuring good health and fruitful work, keeping

away spirits, and protecting against epidemics. They are not taken internally and have psychological rather than direct physical effects—much like any good luck charm. The amulets usually contain sacred sand (*fasy sikidy*) which comes from a particular location, wood shavings, metal, oil, and sometimes honey. These ingredients are usually either sewn into a piece of red, yellow, or black cloth and worn around the neck, or put into a zebu horn or other container. On some occasions the ingredients are applied to the face.

Before placing the ingredients into the container, certain *sikidy* patterns are formed and the sacred sand is placed on particular columns. For example, for an amulet to keep away spirits (an *aolilolo*) the following five *sikidy* patterns were made and sacred sand was placed on the columns represented by o's.

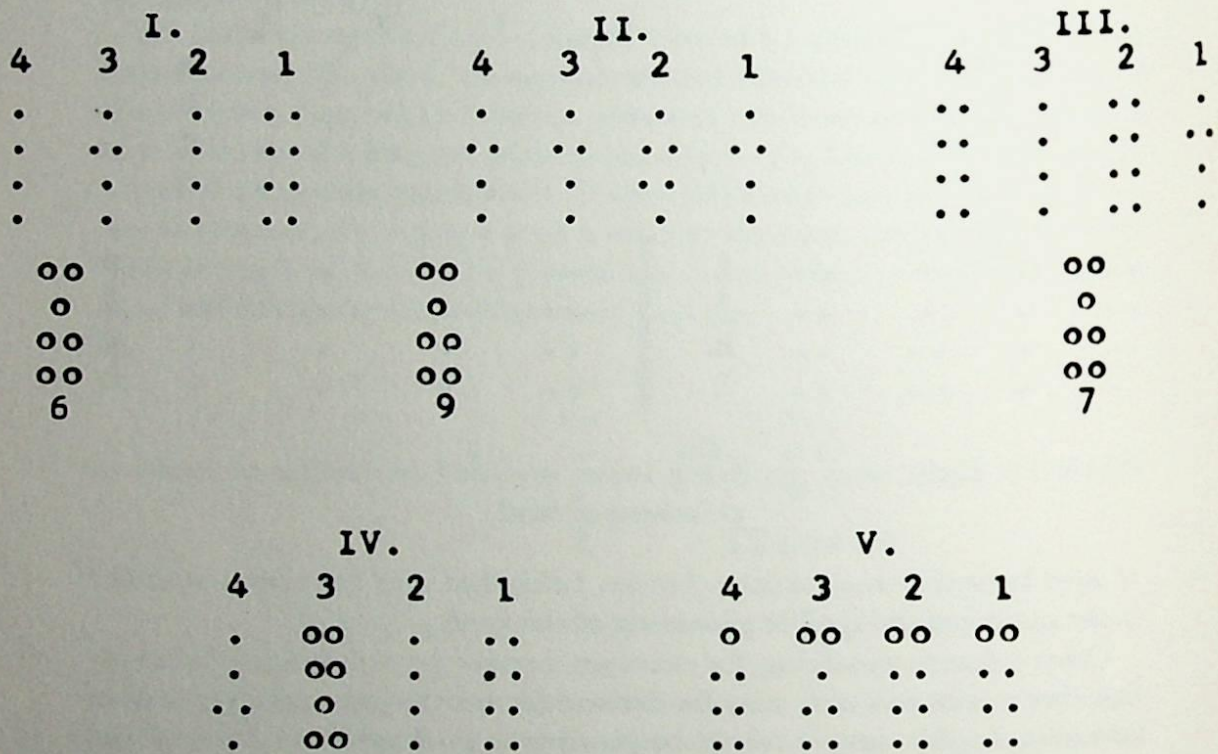


Figure 12.

It may be noted that the entire twelve columns of each pattern were not formed, but simply the first four columns and the particular columns on which sand was placed. After the *sikidy* configurations have been made and sand has been placed on the required columns, the sand is then mixed with the other ingredients and the amulet is completed. The finished amulet and

the money paid for it are held over a burning piece of *aramy* and an incantation is recited.

We were unable to discover the reasons for forming specific *sikidy* patterns in making amulets and for placing the sand on certain columns. Different patterns, however, are formed for each type of medicine and it appears that the particular patterns used vary from *ombiasa* to *ombiasa*.

DISCUSSION

Divination by *sikidy* is extremely impressive. Some factors which contribute to this are: the complexity of the procedure itself; its ancient, mysterious origins and foreign terminology; and the supernatural powers attributed to the *sikidy*. All of these seem to reinforce the confidence of both the clients and the diviners in the technique.

The great confidence that the people have in *sikidy* has been noted by several authors (DuBois;⁴ Colin;⁵ Decary.⁶) Decary cites Père Luis Mariano as one of the first Europeans to speak of this: "Les habitants de l'Ouest ne font aucun acte important sans consulter les sortilèges qui se font de plusieurs manières sur le sable, avec des noyaux de tamarin . . ." ("The inhabitants of the West undertake no important act without performing divination by lots which is done in several ways on the sand with the seeds of the tamarind . . .")

DuBois stresses that the people by no means regard the outcomes of *sikidy* as arbitrary, but rather attribute them to some mysterious power who speaks to man through the *sikidy*.

This confidence is well illustrated by two experiences which we had. As far as we know, divination was performed about a matter directly related to us on only two occasions. The first time was when we lost a cigarette lighter. The diviner performed *sikidy* and said, with certainty, that it was in the car. Although we searched the car thoroughly and did not find it, he still maintained that it was there. We decided that we must have dropped it somewhere on the road. Several weeks later, however, he found it in an almost inaccessible place in the car. His second performance of *sikidy* was to find out what day we would return to the village from a trip we had taken. He knew the week we were arriving but not the day. This was the time of year when the rice was being planted and the men spent all day in the fields. When we arrived in the village, however, the diviner was not in his field, but at home waiting for us. He said the *sikidy* had told him we would be coming back on that day.

It is important to note here that the people have confidence not only in the *sikidy*, but in the diviner as well. Each *ombiasa* has his own reputation, and some are thought to be better than others. Although the *sikidy* are invested

with power, it is ultimately the task of the diviner to interpret the results, and it is the ability of the diviner that is called upon for this task. Since the results can often be interpreted in several ways, the *ombiasa's* sensitivity to his clients' problems and social situations, his practical knowledge of their affairs, and any ESP ability he may possess or develop could be of use to him in formulating the final interpretation. All *ombiasas* are probably equally familiar with the techniques used in *sikidy* and therefore it may be that these additional personal qualities or abilities actually determine an *ombiasa's* success.

Colin believes that the diviners have undeniable powers. He was greatly impressed by two incidents involving the clairvoyance of *ombiasas** and believes that the role of clairvoyance in the work of the *ombiasa* is underestimated: "Simple jeu de hasard, pensent beaucoup d'Européens qui n'ont pas eu l'occasion de pénétrer le mentalité malgache et qui ignorent les étranges et réelles facultés de clairvoyance des 'sorciers.'" ⁷ ("A simple game of chance, think many Europeans who have not had the opportunity to penetrate the Malagasy mentality and who ignore the strange and real faculties of clairvoyance of the sorcerers.")

It does seem that *sikidy* could be a vehicle through which ESP and PK can operate. The atmosphere in which it is performed is probably conducive to the functioning of ESP and PK in that it is usually relaxed, there is most likely a minimum of anxiety on the diviner's part since the outcome is attributed to some external, supernatural power rather than to his own powers, and there is a very strong belief in the validity of the procedure. ESP, however, is unreliable in that, as far as we know, it cannot be consciously controlled and made to operate at will. The ESP ability of the diviner, therefore, is probably not the sole determinant of his success, but an important and useful complement to the other personal qualities and abilities he has developed.

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2. RHINE, LOUISA, E., *Hidden Channels of the Mind* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1961), p. 215.

* In one instance, a Tanosy (a tribe in the south) *ombiasa* described Colin's appearance in detail to a friend of his before his arrival. In the other, a Mahafaly (another tribe in the south) *ombiasa* saw a photograph of Colin's mother and insisted that she was dead despite Colin's denials. Colin received a letter about two weeks later informing him that she had died suddenly a few days prior to this incident.

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5. COLIN, *op. cit.*
6. DECARY, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
7. COLIN, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

DISCUSSION

BRIER: Bob, at the end of my paper I mentioned that I had an experimental design for your practice because I know you're going back, and you can do it if you're interested to see if you can get some experimental evidence as to whether or not the thing works in addition to your anecdotal material. Linda was talking about the practice where you can divine any one of seven days to tell on what day you should set out on a journey; in your case, when you returned, it was done. Why couldn't you do an experiment where you, say, set out on artificial journeys? They don't have to have a real purpose. Then you have Bernard divine what day of the week you're going to return. Then you randomly determine which day of the week you return; this can be repeated for as much time as you have and then you have a probability of 1-7 of being correct and you can see if he really can do it. Would you be interested in doing something like that?

ROBERT SUSSMAN: Linda would.

BRIER: It sounds like the kind of thing that could be tested empirically to obtain some hard data.

ROBERT SUSSMAN: Right.

SKINNER: You said that this was of Arabic origin.

LINDA SUSSMAN: Yes.

SKINNER: As I listened to you, on the role of the ancestor, the whole structure of the initial plan seemed to have a wider distribution and may in fact be related to the populations in the Moçambique area and farther westward. What do you think?

LINDA SUSSMAN: Well, I know that something similar to this is also done in East Africa and the Comores Islands.

ROBERT SUSSMAN: But many of the terms used are Arabic, and in the Comores Islands they have ancient Arabic texts about astrology and divination, and I think that both the East African and the Malagasy divination are thought to be of Arabic origin.

SKINNER: You get something similar in West Africa related southward to the whole cult of Ifa, so you might have an earlier horizon here of some kind of syncretism at work.

ROBERT AND LINDA SUSSMAN: It could be.

BOSHIER: I haven't come across this with the Bantu-speaking people, but the bushmen in the Kalihari have seeds a bit larger than these which they use together with small wooden disks. But up as far as I've gone in Mozambique and East Africa, there is no indication anywhere that this is possibly mixed up with astrology as Linda and Bob have suggested.

VAN DE CASTLE: Yes, Dr. Bharati.

BHARATI: Aren't you using the term astrology rather loosely? Because when you talk about any of the traditions like the Hindu tradition, there's also reference to constellations and to astrology.

ROBERT SUSSMAN: They have a complete system of astrology and all of these terms are related to the days of the week and the months of the year.

LINDA SUSSMAN: The main connection is through the names of the configurations of the seeds, such as Alohotsy and Asombola, which in the Comores Islands are identical to the names of the astrological signs. In Madagascar, some of the names have changed, and so the correspondence is less exact than in the Comores Islands.

BHARATI: Are these people official nominal Moslems?

ROBERT SUSSMAN: In the Comores Islands, they are, but not at all in Madagascar, although the divination system is very similar in the two places. It seems like much of the history of this practice has been lost in Madagascar, whereas it is still preserved in the Comores Islands.

DEVEREUX: Do you happen to know that Professor Linton also practiced this kind of divination and more or less believed in it? Do you have any access to unpublished data of his?

ROBERT SUSSMAN: No, unfortunately not.

DEVEREUX: Is there any possibility of interviewing Mrs. Linton?

ROBERT SUSSMAN: Yes, there might be a possibility and there might be a possibility of getting unpublished notes. That would be a very interesting idea I hadn't thought of. Thank you.

DEVEREUX: Secondly, I was very much struck by the "wake-up" exclamation. In the cult of Dionysos at Delphi, once a year the women assem-

bled to "wake up" Dionysos, represented by a phallus in a winnowing basket: in other words, covered with seeds. It's mentioned in Plutarchos' essay: *On Isis and Osiris*.

WALTER: I just wanted to express a hope that Linda and Bob could do a run here.

ROBERT SUSSMAN: Well, we could do that, but it would essentially be a repeat of what we did there.

BHARATI: You don't believe you could do it without the special training the diviner has?

ROBERT SUSSMAN: That's true, except we were given some medicines to give us certain powers. This, for example, is one of these medicines.

BHARATI: Then the power rests in that object, not in you.

ROBERT SUSSMAN: The power is transferred through the object to me.

SKINNER: In terms of your own experience with the diviner, and in terms for a request for experimentation, it seems to me that experimentation of cross-cultural universes pose many problems—not only the question of skills, the question of belief, but the question of perception. In terms of the attempt of Weiner and others to look at parapsychological phenomena cross-culturally, I wonder about this. You talked about linguistic problems this morning, interpretation, and I wonder how valid it would be from the perspective of Westerners to conduct experimentation. I can assure you that within the cultural universe of many of these African groups, there's always some contingency factor which precludes it. I gave up finally trying to pin it down; and the final attitude was, "Well, you've lived too long in the West. Your ancestors forgot, therefore you will have to come back and your children's children's children will then re-acquire the capacity to understand and to manipulate the supernatural." I'm talking about this whole cultural universe in which many of these things are built in structurally in terms of princes, slaves, East/West; I wonder about the attempts at cross-cultural comparison and how far we can get and whether or not at some point in time we can understand the South Africans and their congresses of witch doctors, for their own reasons. I wonder at what point in time we can lean over their shoulders and really try to find out what's going on among them.

SMITH: I think in connection with how far one can go to bridge one culture to another and how far one can't, this should be an empirical matter, not arbitrarily decided for or against in any way. I recall a book that impressed me very much, *Black Hamlet*, years ago, in which a psychia-

trist set out to study an African witch doctor. He set out very knowingly, but very quickly, within a week or two, they were brothers—not a psychiatrist examining a superstitious witch doctor. That to my mind was a very telling example of how cultures can be bridged. So I say why not bridge them as much as we can. I think that if the anthropologist is concerned with man and not simply examining isolated cultures, then he must not stop short of the very difficult but very important attempt to bridge cultures.

VAN DE CASTLE: I'd like to make a comment on how that might possibly be done. Last year when I made the trip down to the San Blas Islands, I took along with me a young sensitive from London, Malcolm Bessent, who knew nothing about the culture or language. He was able to do some rather remarkable things there because he would come up to the natives, look at them for a moment and list a very detailed description of their family: "There are five people in your family. You have a younger sister who is about sixteen that you're very much worried about. You lost your father last year and you'd always been very close to your father 'cause you'd go fishing with your father." Then he'd do very detailed physical diagnoses: "You've had trouble with your left knee for the past three months. You have trouble with your right shoulder blade and that's been going on for about a month and you have a lot of trouble sleeping with it." Of course, these varied in terms of specificity. At least if one were to judge what the Cunas were replying, I would have to give him an accuracy figure of somewhere in the neighborhood of 85 percent, which impressed them a great deal. Then he would go on to some psychic healing and his own claim was that when his hands were warm and they felt tingly, he could then heal. If someone were having problems in their knees, Malcolm would hold his hand over their knees for awhile and then rub them. Probably the most dramatic case was an older man whose hand was very much crippled from arthritis. He had not been able to hold a machete for about six months, which troubled him a great deal because the work ethic of the Cuna stresses that you should be busy from dawn to dusk and even a little later. Malcolm placed his hand over the native's hand for just a few minutes. When we went back the next night to check, the man was just as pleased as he could be. He had been able to hold his machete. He had chopped sugar cane all that day, and was just absolutely delighted. When I would take Malcolm to interview some of the Neles or local shamans, he was able to exchange viewpoints with them. "This is how I do it. How do you do it?" "I'll give you a demonstration of what I do. Will you give me a demonstration of what you do?" Unfortunately, it got to be a little bit too one-sided. Malcolm was willing to demonstrate much more than they were. I think that as an approach it might work where we have a sensitive from this culture

going down to talk to a sensitive to that culture, and by operating, in a sense, as colleagues—not in any attempt to show him how superior we are, but, rather, “We’re in this together; we both have had similar experiences; would you be willing to exchange some information?” With that setup, it might be possible to get a chance to observe and possibly validate or document some of these phenomena.

BRIER: I understand why you’re raising the question, because past cross-cultural experiments have not been successful and there’s no great background of literature showing wonderful results. But I think in a case like this where, say, Bob and Linda are friends of someone who practices it, perhaps they can work from within the framework that the man uses. I mean, it’s certainly pointless to go there and give the man ESP tests with cards. This has been done and it hasn’t worked, which is not surprising.

VAN DE CASTLE: With one exception.

BRIER: With one exception, of course, Bob’s work. But I think what might be possible is to work within the framework and then just tack on our Western scientific analysis afterwards. That is, let the man “do his thing,” and if it’s amenable to our kind of analysis, once you’re out of there with the data, then do it. That might work.

BOSHIER: I think this might be the time to tell what happened to me a couple of months ago in South Africa when I was personally going through an initiation with the Zulus, and I asked the presiding witch doctor, a priestess, if it didn’t trouble her that not only was I European, but I had come from England and as far as I knew, my ancestors came from England. Now here was someone who practiced ancestor worship, and she appeared somewhat shocked. I must stress that this was a person with a purely tribal background. She spoke no English whatsoever. She had visited Johannesburg once but the rest of the time she had lived in the heart of the Drakensberg mountains in Zululand, and she said with great surprise, “Heavens, it makes no difference. My ancestors and your ancestors are in communion and we get onto this level and there’s no difference whatsoever. You and I today are different. I accept it. You must accept it, but we came from a common source.” I stress, this is a tribal woman. And she said, “When we go back into the next world, we will be together again. On this level when we are dealing with the spirits, there is no difference whatsoever, and any witch doctor can be black or can be white and it makes no difference, and I can accept you only because my ancestors do.”

HAYNES: This isn’t a controversial statement. But I think an example of trans-cultural healing is already being provided by Dr. Lambo, who is a

Nigerian. He is at present running a psychiatry unit in Nigeria with some Western psychiatrists, cooperating all the time with African witch doctors or, rather, healers.

VAN DE CASTLE: I didn't mean to imply by my statements about Bessent that this was necessarily on a paranormal basis. A parapsychologist isn't going to immediately jump in and look for psi as the primary or exclusive explanation. He would certainly be willing to consider any other parsimonious interpretations until the point is reached that they seem to be inadequate. In this case I would certainly acknowledge the possible role of suggestion in the remission of the rheumatoid arthritis.

DEVEREUX: I'm sorry to have to criticize again an "elder." But I have serious reservations concerning the value of a certain colleague's work. I regret to say that I have been told by somebody reliable, whose name I cannot reveal, that in one of that colleague's papers it is stated that all the patients he discussed had had EEGs. My informant told me that there was only one EEG in that colleague's country and that one had been struck by lightning a year and a half earlier.

HALIFAX-GROF: The example that Mrs. Haynes cited is certainly not the only one. I can cite my own work as an example. In the University of Miami School of Medicine, I was essentially in the role of "cultural broker." That is to say I was a bridge between various groups or co-cultures in the community and the hospital system. In that role one can function as a means wherein indigenous healers can move into the hospital system and do what they will with dignity, and patients within the system can be referred out of the hospital system to appropriate healers.

BOSHIER: I am pleased to hear that it's being done in Miami. It's also being done in Johannesburg where patients are referred by both African and European medical doctors to witch doctors, whether you like the term or not. It doesn't mean what I think you think it means. Healers, priests, diviners, psychiatrists—whatever you want to call them—patients are being referred to them. And what is more, the witch doctor, priest, diviner, or whatever you want to call him, is referring some of his patients to those same European clinics.

HALIFAX-GROF: That is also the case in Miami.

BOSHIER: It's running very well and has been for some years.