

## AFRICAN APPRENTICESHIP

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Ten years ago while sitting in a trading store in the African bush, the discussion between the trader and myself swung inevitably to the customs and behavior of the African people. Mention was made of a strange woman who periodically visited his store. He took great pity on her, giving her, free of charge, the meal, sugar and flour which she would demand in a demented manner. Entering the store loudly, chanting and babbling incoherently, ordering this and that, she met opposition from no one. She was, he informed me, completely insane, as was proven by the fear and silence exhibited by the other customers in her presence.

I was intrigued by this description and pressed him for further details on her appearance. She wore her hair in long ringlets with a cowrie shell dangling over her forehead. Her clothing was richly beaded and skins hung from her shoulders and waist. Instead of the traditional copper bangles, she wore bracelets of skin on her wrists.

Eugene, the storekeeper, had described to me a female African witch doctor. He refused to accept this however, and kept insisting she was simply a mad old woman, obviously an outcast from her tribe, probably destitute. With great difficulty I persuaded my sceptical friend to supply me with a guide who knew the whereabouts of this "lunatic."

Upon arrival at a village some ten miles away, we were directed to one of the mud huts where we found the woman, Makosa, sitting on the floor amongst bones, dice and shells—her instruments of divination. Completely unperturbed by the arrival of our party, she did not even look up, but continued studying and re-throwing the bones. Eventually she spoke. "One of you is here to ask me questions, he has a head full of questions, he is not a man of this land, but comes from over the big water." Then, ignoring the others she looked directly at me and asked, "What do you want?" I chided her and in the traditional manner told her to inquire this of her spirits. Again she picked up her bones, blew on them, and cast them down. She repeated this process three times, studying carefully the pattern between



each throw. After some time she picked up a small knuckle bone and said that this bone represented me. I was the bone of the impala. The impala ram is an animal who lives with its herd most of the time, she told me, but periodically it leaves its group and goes off into the wilds by itself. It always returns to its herd, but again it must leave to wander alone. "This is you," she said. "You live with your people, but sometimes you must go into the bush alone. You walk by day and by night. You sleep under trees, like the impala ram. You go wherever you feel, wherever your spirits lead you. When you return to your people, they ask why you go off alone into the wilds. They think you are mad. But I know why you do this—I do it too. You go to learn, living in the wild places, the mountains, the desert. You will go on doing this throughout your life, living with your people, then leaving them to walk alone in the bush with your spirits. This is your life's work. What you learn is what the spirits are teaching you. This is the only way."

The old woman continued throwing the bones and revealing personal details concerning my life, which were absolutely accurate. As concerns my resemblance to the impala she described perfectly in the African idiom my apprenticeship to the wilderness of that country. Upon arrival in South Africa seven years earlier, I had set off to learn firsthand about the peoples, the nature and the past of the "Dark Continent." My destinations were those blank spaces on maps, where after initial hardships, I learned the art of living off the land. Such an existence taught me much about the country and its wildlife, but probing the customs, beliefs, etc. of the people proved to be a far more difficult and lengthy undertaking, for the historians and spiritual leaders of African society are the witch doctors—people like Makosa who tell only so much, whose revelations are very limited to the uninitiated.

Following my first encounter with Makosa I found myself in a neighboring tribe with people whom I already knew quite well, the Bakgatla, and it was at this time that I was requested to become a member of their tribe. Following the induction ceremony with the paramount chief and his councillors, thirty-five elderly witch doctors, an old man stood up. This was Moroki Ranyadi, the paramount chief's personal witch doctor, who boasted to the gathering that he knew more about his people, their history and culture, than anyone else in the tribe, and as these were the things I was interested in he could help me more than any other person. The others clapped their hands in acknowledgment. Then, taking a copper bangle from his arm he handed it to the chief, who gave it to me. I was told that it had been made by his grandfather, as was a second gift: a large iron hoe-head of native manufacture. His grandfather had been the last miner



and metal-worker of the Bakgatla people and from him Moroki knew the whereabouts of their own iron and copper workings; he also knew how to extract and smelt the ore.

He then asked the chief for permission to take me to these ancient mines. The chief immediately agreed, whereupon Moroki told me that he would now consult his own spirits and seek their consent. I waited in his village for a week while he communed with his spirits.

They apparently approved, for on the seventh day we left the village and drove some ninety-five miles westward to the border of what was then Bechuanaland. In a very remote range of mountains we spent the following week walking and examining ancient copper mines. One morning as we were approaching one of the old workings and were about to enter, a leopard bolted out of the tunnel and fled past us. We remarked upon our good fortune, for had we trapped the animal inside, it would have attacked us, putting a rapid end to our expedition.

The week we spent in those mountains was tremendously exciting, for I learned from him the entire process of Bantu mining, especially the rituals and observances aimed at appeasing the underworld spirits. It was evident that the earth spirits were very powerful, for they controlled the elements and were directly responsible for the prosperity of the land.

At the end of the week I returned Moroki to his village and headed for Johannesburg. En route I again visited the old witch doctor, Makosa. She was in her "hut of the spirits" throwing the bones. I entered and, as before, she continued casting. After a time she looked up and told me that something was wrong; her bones were not speaking properly. She was obviously concerned, as are all witch doctors, that someone had been influencing them. She went on and on throwing them, muttering and shaking her head. "No," she said. "Something is wrong. The spirits are not talking nicely." I inquired what it was the spirits were saying. "All I can see is the underworld, the underground," she told me. "This is the bone of the antbear, the anteater. I see you as the antbear who lives under the ground. It makes no sense to me."

Her concern was so great that I immediately put her at ease and told her that it could be correct as I had been underground. "Then the bones are right and the spirits are talking well. You were down under the ground, but you must be very careful when you go down there, as the gods of the underworld can be very dangerous. Also, I see you here in my bones next to the leopard. The leopard too was in that place, and he does not like people in his home. You must be very careful of this animal. I see you were right next to him."

The traditional form of religion amongst the Bantu of southern Africa is



ancestor worship; the welfare of the people depends directly on communication with their ancestors in the spirit world. The term witch doctor is used to denote the priest, prophet, physician, herbalist, psychiatrist, diviner and historian of the tribe. They are the intermediaries between the tribespeople and their ancestors; they play a vital role in the community. It is the witch doctor to whom everyone turns in time of trouble, whether it be physiological or psychological, crop failure, a lost cow, or a drought.

Probably the most common form of witch doctor in southern Africa is the sangoma. They may be either male or female; however, in my experience I have found the latter to be most common. The sangoma-to-be is assailed by an illness which is diagnosed by an older doctor as the Moya, or spirit which has possessed the body of that person. This indication demands that the individual be initiated and trained as a doctor. The form of illness which overcomes the person does not differ greatly from that which accompanies the calling of future shamans of Asiatic, Australian and American communities.

The initiated sangoma works with his or her spirit for the benefit of the people. They divine and cure illnesses, officiate at all religious ceremonies, and maintain constant contact with the spirit world. All the Bantu peoples of South Africa believe in a supreme being, but do not believe that mortal beings possess the power or the right to appeal directly to the Almighty. The intermediary between God and the sangomas are the spirits or ancestors. A particularly powerful sangoma will be one who in prayer is able to address by name many members of his ancestral line. These supplications may be channeled through either the male or female side of the family.

To maintain contact with the spirit world and indeed to commune at all with the ancestors, one must tend conscientiously to their welfare, offering food, tobacco, snuff, in fact almost any commodity. The most vital of these offerings is blood, and though animal sacrifice is the usual form, its universal substitute, red ochre, may be used as it is considered to be blood of the earth, or of the mother goddess.

In studying the blood rituals of the people of the subcontinent, I have been deeply impressed with the great antiquity of their religious ceremonies, for quite fortuitously my archaeological work has had direct bearing upon the ancient beliefs of life after death, of ancestor worship and of rituals employing blood as the principal source of spirit communion. We are dealing here with the basic principles of all religions and, I believe, of what is today termed parapsychology, or paranormal phenomena. Therefore, I propose to outline briefly the archaeological work we have been undertaking in South Africa for the past ten years.

In 1964, while working in the rugged mountains of Swaziland, I discov-



ered what transpired to be the oldest known mines in the world. The substance being mined there more than 40,000 years ago was haematite, which produced red ochre for the earliest-known homo sapiens. (Exactly as those same haematites are ground up and used by Africans today.)

In our work on red ochre, we have proposed that those middle Stone Age men indulged in the earliest form of religious ritual. This was the burial of their dead, liberally coated with powdered haematite or bloodstone. My supervisor in this work, Professor Raymond Dart, has repeatedly drawn attention to the uses of these red pigments as a substitute for blood by peoples throughout the world from earliest historic periods up to the Middle Ages. To primitive man the association of blood with life was elementary, for from mortal wounds flowed blood, the most tangible manifestation of death. Conversely the first indication of pregnancy is the cessation of the menstrual flow, for the blood is now involved in the forming of a new life. Blood to early man was inextricably bound with his philosophies of life, and as such has featured in all primitive ceremonies aimed at increasing or actually renewing life.

The inclusion in prehistoric burials of quantities of red ochre was apparently aimed at regenerating life in the afterworld; it was probably but the first of many ceremonies at which blood or its substitute, red ochre, was employed in an effort to renew life and thereby communicate with the departed. This was certainly the aim of sacrifices in ancient Greek times when Homer's *Odyssey* reveals "that the spirits of the dead could be summoned up: they gathered around in droves when an animal's throat was cut so as to drink its blood and become alive for a time, however brief."

The ancient beliefs concerning blood and life are of course by no means confined to this continent nor the African peoples alone; synonymous ceremonies are conducted everywhere up to the present day, one being the observance of Eucharist, where red wine is taken to represent the blood of the Son of God.

My first encounter of ochre being used as a direct substitute for blood occurred in 1965 in a remote region of the Transvaal. I had been living in a range of mountains for almost seven years, conducting a survey of prehistoric rock art and investigating the people of the area.

A serious six-year drought had caused the tribesmen to revert to hunting; things had now become so crucial that every effort was being made to discover the cause of the drought. In their endeavor I was consulted and so followed lengthy discussion with the chief and his councillors. At this stage I inquired why, in my search for painted sites, I had discovered the tribal drums hidden away in a cave. Some consternation followed this announcement, as the cavern in question had apparently been treated with



magic: a spell had been put on it that prevented anyone from discovering or entering it.

I was then told that the sacred drums had been hidden away following threats made by European missionaries at the end of the last century. The tribal elders informed me that they would dearly love to take out the drums again if I could assure them that the white man's god would not take revenge. In addition they required blood if they were to relive the ancient ceremony. I begged them not to consider human sacrifice as this would surely cause great trouble. My fears were immediately allayed, however, when an old witch doctor explained that his people had long ago stopped ritual murders; what they needed was another blood, the blood of the Mother Earth. When I offered to obtain some haematite for them they politely explained that they must first see the material as only the ochre used by their forefathers was suitable.

There was nowhere to go but the ancient mines of Swaziland and within a month I returned with a load of haematite. This was eagerly accepted and preparations were made for one of their most important ceremonies. Having since been initiated into the school of those very same drums, I am not at liberty to describe the ritual in detail. Broadly, it entails the sacrifice of an ox with whose fat the ground ochre is mixed. This "blood" is then smeared on the drums and at a ceremony lasting from sunset to sunrise these instruments are beaten nonstop. This I was told would definitely please the spirits, for they never refused such an offering of blood. Happily I must add that the 1965-1966 rainy season in the northern Transvaal was one of the finest in decades.

While preparing this paper I thought it might be of interest to the conference if the participants heard the predictions concerning my attendance here, so I paid a visit to one of the sangomas with whom we are working in Johannesburg and asked her to throw the bones for me, as I was about to take a long journey.

She cast her bones onto the floor, studied them carefully, and then spoke: "You will go across the big water soon, to another country a long way away. There you will sit with many people who will want to know everything about your work. They will ask you about the sangomas in Africa and you must tell them just how it is. You must tell them this: that no one becomes sangoma without first getting sick. Everyone who is called by the spirits gets the sickness, a bad sickness. No one can become a sangoma who does not get this. You must tell these people what happens to us, all the sangomas when that spirit calls them. Ohh! How hard it is and how hard we must work with those spirits. They will ask you all the questions and you will tell them fine."



Dorcas, the woman reading the bones, is a middle-aged Zulu, the daughter of a Methodist minister who received her calling in the classical manner. Here, transcribed directly from a tape recording, is her description of a sangoma, and a little of her own story.

"The sangoma is a person with a strong spirit. All people have a spirit, black people, white people, Chinese people, but God chooses some to talk through. It is like he gives some people a gift. All have spirit, but for some it is a gift, and those people become sangomas. Like Jesus, do you know Jesus? God gave him a big, big gift, a large spirit. Many of the people didn't understand this about him. But he had that spirit. He walked alone in the mountains, didn't he? He talked with his spirits, didn't he? He made sick people better, didn't he? It is just like that. But you must go out; you must go into the mountains, you know. How can you know anything if you don't go out? How can people learn about the spirits of the mountains and the rivers if they just go to university? No, to learn about the spirits you must go out alone into the wild places.

"When my spirit came I was sick—oh I was so sick. I lay in bed for three years—I could not eat or drink or even walk. I just lay there day after day and at night dreams would come! At night I would leave my body and my spirit would go far far away to other places that my body never sees. My spirit would see so many things in the night. And then in the morning, before the sun comes up, my spirit would return to my body, and I would lay in bed another day.

"I went to many white doctors and black medical doctors. I was a Christian—my father was a Methodist minister, and I wanted the medical doctors to make me better. None of them could find what was wrong with me, none of them could cure me. Finally, at Baragwanath Hospital a Dr. Steyn told me, "You must go to your own doctors. They can help you and we cannot." He knew. But still I would not go.

"One night, in a dream my grandfather came to me and told me, 'You are not sick. You are going to help your people. I like you very much, and my spirit will enter your body, and you will do my work.' But I still wanted nothing to do with it. I was a Christian and I wanted nothing of that sangoma business.

"The sangomas would visit me and tell me that I had the spirit. But I told my mother to send them away. I did not want to hear them! At night the sangomas would come in my dreams and shout at me that I must become sangoma. I did not want to hear it. I asked my mother to move my bed into the other room, because the spirits would not leave me alone in my own room. But they even found me there in the lounge. My mother got so tired taking care of me she finally told me, 'Oh Dorcas, I wish God would take



you now.' But he did not take me and those spirits did not leave me alone. They came so strong it was like at the cinema, the pictures came before my eyes just like they were real. My eyes saw everything, but my body could not move. They came all the time to me, shouting and showing me things like beads, skins and herbs. But still I would not give in.

'I am a Christian, not a sangoma! You must go away.' But they would not go away.

"One night they came in my dreams, while I was sleeping in the lounge. There were many of them and they sat at the foot of my bed on that long bench there. They were just like real people. Big big sangomas they were. They sat there and they ordered me to sing. They clapped their hands and they sang a song which I can still remember. They said, 'Sing!' There was one very big fat sangoma. She told me, 'Get up! Get up and sing! You are sangoma, you are not sick! Wake up—you must wake up and teach!' Then they just disappeared.

"One night in a dream they showed me a headdress I must make out of beads and wool. I did make that headdress, with the long wool strands like sangoma hair, and beads on all the strands. I did not wear it, but I did make it. Finally one night my grandfather came to me in a dream and told me, 'You must wear it. If you do not wear it I will kill you!'

"At this point I went to the Apostolic Church who said they would cure me. They carried me to a river, and put me in that water right up to my neck. But then, when I was in that river I suddenly felt something under my feet. It lifted me right up. I was terrified! I leapt out of that river and saw that it was a big snake—it was my grandfather! At that point the Apostolic Church gave up. They said, 'Your grandfather wants you to become sangoma, and we can do nothing. You must give in.' At home that night I talked with my father and he said to me that even though he was a Methodist minister he knew that my spirit was that of a sangoma.

"The next day my mother took me to my auntie's house, my auntie who is sangoma. At her house all the sangomas came to see me. They beat the drum and said, 'Get up and dance!' I did get up. I did dance and I did sing. Hours and hours it was like to me, singing and dancing. For three years I had not been able to walk. Now, this day, I was dancing! The sangomas all laughed and laughed at me, and I could not stop dancing. Finally I fell back to bed, exhausted. My training had begun. That was in 1962. Ohh! What a time that was, when I started to dance and gave in to the spirits."

Sangoma training involves the learning of songs, special dances, drumming, the ingestion of emetics for purification, and the continual instruction of the Baba as she watches her twasa carefully, noting her particular spirit manifestation. They are encouraged daily to strengthen and use the



spirit that is possessing them. They are called anytime, day or night, to find things that the Baba has "hidden" somewhere in the village. At first the teacher will tell the twasa that something is hidden for her, but as the training progresses the Baba will no longer inform the initiate verbally, but will call her employing telepathic methods. Mild drugs may be used when signs of the spirit slack off, or in clarifying the meaning of dreams and hallucinatory experiences.

The possessing spirit may be male or female, usually a relative, but occasionally not, sometimes even an in-law of the sangoma. It is quite obvious to the observer which sex is possessing the sangoma in trance as a woman may suddenly speak in a deep male voice, her features changing, her gestures becoming decidedly masculine. Very commonly the spirit coming through will speak in a completely different language.

As the training continues, more spirits may come through to the initiate. None of the sangomas we work with have had less than six months' initial training. Some have trained up to two or three years. The end of the instruction period is usually decided by the spirits of the initiate, but no twasa may leave without her teacher's permission.

The coming-out ceremony of the newly qualified sangoma again centers around the sacrifice of an animal. The animal is hidden sometimes far from the village and the apprentice must discover its exact whereabouts. Back in the village, the animal is slaughtered, the bladder taken, its contents drunk by the twasa and the inflated bladder tied into her hair. Again strips of the hide are cut, tied about her wrists, shoulders and waist, the blood is drunk and the meat consumed by the trainee and the attending sangomas. The ritual heralds the end of training and the qualified sangoma is now ready to begin her own practice.

Her dreams, fits and seizures are now all utilized in her work, in divination, in guiding her as to which herbs to use for her patients and treatments necessary in each case. She may suddenly leave her home, as willed by the spirits, to visit various parts of the country. She may go as far as one of the oceans in search of knowledge, experience and wisdom. It is not unlikely that she will again become sick after some time of practice. Spirits may enter her body which she can no longer handle—her dreams may become completely out of hand once more and she may revert to a similar state as in her pre-twasa days. This is the signal for further training. Again she will be led by her dreams and visions to another teacher, to a more highly qualified teacher. It is here that she will then commence what is called "the second pot," the second stage of training.

There are twelve stages of training in all—twelve "pots"—twelve types of spirits. The first is simply umlozi, the last or highest being balozi. Not all



sangomas reach this level, but those that do are considered the most powerful.

The spirit with which they now work may come to the young sangoma at any time, often completely unbidden. The most important thing, however, is their ability to summon up the spirit, thereby utilizing it for their people and their society. The mode of divination is so vastly different from the European mode of diagnosis that one wonders how they ever adjust to the European doctors. An African suffering from any misfortune: physiological, psychical or otherwise, will go to the home of a sangoma and simply demand that the sangoma tell him what he has come for. "I want to know" (*sia cou lega*), will be his only statement. With no further prompting whatsoever the sangoma must tell the patient exactly why he has come, and how to cure or remedy his troubles.

The study we are undertaking with assistance from the Parapsychology Foundation has centered mostly around the life of a young Swazi sangoma, Ndlaleni Cindi. She is an excellent diviner and one whom we have frequently observed diagnosing and treating patients. Here is her own account of the procedure:

"A patient comes into my house and says 'Sia cou lega'—I want to know. I leave him and go into my room, put on my clothes, pick up my switch and begin to sing. I ask my ancestors to tell me what is wrong with this person. I sing and sing, walking around until I feel the spirit coming. When it comes it feels like a heavy weight on the back of my head and my shoulders. Very heavy on me. Then I must go to that patient and start to talk. I must talk until the spirit goes. I cannot stop until it is finished. Sometimes I don't even know what I was saying and the patient must tell me. Sometimes I can hear my words, but don't understand them. When I come back afterwards I feel like I have been dreaming.

Sometimes it comes quickly, sometimes you have to work very hard to make it come, singing and singing and asking your ancestors. But they always tell you right. When the patient leaves I must thank my ancestors right away."

Ndlaleni first came to the Museum some sixteen months ago in the company of another witch doctor, and immediately agreed to my testing her spirit. Leaving her in my office with the other witch doctor and Miss Costello, I went to a neighboring building and took out the skin of a gemsbok. This I hid beneath a canvas sail on the back of my land rover. I then called her outside and told her I had hidden something which she must find. With the aid of the other witch doctor, she knelt down and began to sing softly. Then in trance state, she informed me that I had hidden something across on the other side of the building, over there. She



told me that it had more than one color, that it came from an animal, that it was raised up off the ground. Suddenly she got up, ran around the building, out into the front where the land rover stood and knelt down beside the land rover. Again she began singing softly and within five minutes of this she tore off one of her necklaces and holding it in front of her like a divining rod, she walked around the land rover, climbed onto the back and took out the skin.

The sangomas are confident of their position in society and do not regard the Church or Western medicine as a great threat. This even applies to urbanized African society, where witch doctors flourish and count among their patients individuals of great wealth and social standing—even those trained in traditional medicine. The inability of Europeans to handle psychiatric cases strengthens this confidence.

Although great opposition is offered by educated Africans afflicted with the Moya, we have recorded in our present study school teachers, policemen and nursing staff who have been taken by the spirit and trained as witch doctors. At the moment we are working with a female sangoma who qualified as a staff nurse some years ago, and was later compelled to train and become a sangoma.

Only a short while ago during one of my initiation ceremonies, I asked the old woman who was presiding whether she had any regrets, fears, or doubts that she was initiating me into a tribally orientated ceremony, as I was not only European, but acutally came from England. I had not been born here, and none of my ancestors had been in South Africa. She replied that it made no difference whatsoever, she had seen my ancestors in her dreams, and my ancestors and her ancestors spoke to one another—all spirits were the same, when we die we all go to the same place. She said today you and I are different, we live differently, our culture is different, but long long ago we all came from a common source and when we die we go back to the old people—back to the old days, to our ancestors, and on that side there is no difference, we are all the same. She went on, "I can only accept you as a witch doctor because my ancestors and your ancestors have agreed that this should be so, and that is why I invited you here."

At this same ceremony I was required to drink the blood of a sacrificed goat. My Baba informed me that we had to call up the spirits and only this blood-taking ritual could ensure such communication. And so I found myself enacting a custom which in numerous writings I have claimed to be one of man's earliest religious rites.



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## DISCUSSION

BRIER: Dr. Dingwall.

DINGWALL: I found Mr. Boshier's paper absolutely fascinating, and what I really want is information. In my own work with curious people which has been carried on in Haiti where I've been three times mainly to investigate black magic, sexuality and transvestism, I have come to the conclusion that in dealing with primitive people, one has to have something which I can't describe. Of course, you may not think so, but I am fundamentally a very simple and earthy person, and I find that in dealing with people of this sort, one can get into their minds and into their lives in a way which so-called learned people don't succeed in doing at all. And I want to ask him whether he doesn't think that in dealing with the people in Africa, whether their acceptance of him wasn't to a certain extent due to the fact that they recognized in him qualities which were primitive, in the sense that he was one with them. That's what I found in Haiti and I find it very surprising because people think I'm a very sophisticated person, which isn't so at all. I get on extraordinarily well with primitive people of that kind. In fact, when I spent a morning in the great mental asylum with Dr. Price Mars in Haiti, he showed me a very curious case indeed. I began talking to this man, and Dr. Mars said, "Well, what on earth are you doing? Do you know this man won't talk to anybody, not even to us. Why does he talk to you?" I felt a kind of affinity between myself and people of this sort. Do you agree that in this kind of field work that in order to get the kind of results that you get, you have to have, in a sense, a kind of mental affinity with them, and it's really a primitive mentality?

BOSHIER: Yes.



DINGWALL: Thank you. I wanted your opinion very much.

BRIER: Next there will be Sussman and then Skinner.

ROBERT SUSSMAN: I just wondered, since this is so interesting and we're so interested in it, if we could go on, that is, if Mr. Boshier would go on with some of the details of his work.

BRIER: I think most people would probably agree with that.

BOSHIER: Well, I can discuss some cases. I went to witch doctors because in my wanderings through Africa when I got there, I found that these were the spiritual leaders. They were the historians of the tribe there, as I mentioned before, the most intelligent people in the community. And invariably in my visits to them, they would divine for me. Now I have witnessed numerous examples of these. Whether or not they used these divining bones, whereby absolutely this bone falling in this particular position means this or not, is very difficult to say. As I mentioned after the Sussmans' paper, it didn't seem to matter. I recorded the various ways in which bones could fall, we'd then find them fall in that way and read quite differently, and I began to think that it had nothing to do with the bones at all. In the case of other witch doctors I have sat with, we have discussed at great length the meaning of the bones and they have admitted that although their bones are often handed down father to son, they can, in fact, divine with a handful of pebbles—virtually any objects. These are told them in their dream or trance state and they'll pick up anything and divine with it, and all that is is an instrument to focus upon and from there, off they go.

Another case I had was after living with the Kalahari bushmen for awhile, I decided to test my bush survival ability and by taking just a knife and a bag of salt and nothing else, I decided to walk along a particular river which was very fascinating to me because of the tribes that lived along it and because of the wildlife that lived there. The first village I walked to was a witch doctor's village, and I stopped and sat there, had a meal, and he produced these bones and threw them. He then foresaw that I was on a very long walk, a walk that would take me eventually right to Johannesburg which he had heard about but never visited. He said, "You will be walking with the spirits because the land you're going through is very bad country and you'll meet many lions and many elephants, and one elephant and one lion are going to give you a considerable amount of trouble." He went on to say, "You'll come out of it all right, but be very careful."

This was something like a six-hundred-mile walk and it took some months; I did it very slowly and of course, I passed in that country a great



number of elephants and lions all over the place and one night I had a remarkable experience with an elephant, as he predicted. None of the others gave any trouble. And exactly two nights later, I had a very close shave with a lioness, and this is the sort of thing which I have experienced. I do believe that they certainly can tell a great deal with their bones. And when one asks, "How do you do it? Just what do you do?", they explain it is their spirits who possess them and tell them these things, and for this reason a great part of the witch doctor's life is spent in appeasing offended spirits. A great ceremony, of course, is conducted at burials, etc., because the dead are going to come back (this is their ancestor worship), and the dead demand a vehicle through which to speak. Therefore certain ceremonies such as the inclusion of red ocher or some form of blood is used to regenerate life and people who are born blessed by the spirit are then eventually struck down with an illness.

It was interesting, the ceremony this morning by Professor Dingwall on the biblical side. The last slide I showed you was a very senior witch doctor who has trained thirty others. She was the daughter of an ordained Zulu Methodist minister. There was tremendous conflict in her family when this spirit possessed her, and although the Methodists tried all they could, her father, despite being a Methodist minister, finally advised her to go a sangoma and this she did. Now because of her upbringing, she knows the Bible extremely well and recently I went to her concerning this very conference here, and I told her that I was going on a journey and I wanted the bones. I go on journeys frequently as you realize from this field work. When she threw the bones, she said, "But you're going on a different journey; you're going over the big water, and the place you're going to, people are going to know about us, us sangomas, and you must tell them." I have permission to be here, in other words. I'm allowed to tell some of these things. It is very important, indeed. There are certain things which I may not divulge about initiations and ceremonies, but her plea was that the place I was going to would be a great hall with a great number of people and she saw these people. She said, "This is not like your office in the museum where a few people come in; there are a great number of people here." I might say she had one or two words to say about certain individuals here, personalities you might say, but that's another secret. She said, "In that place, you must tell them that we sangomas have no choice. We might have been converted to any of the Western religions. When the spirit takes us over, we have no choice but to be trained." She went on to say, "Me, here, for instance, I was a Methodist and now here I am." And the room she was sitting in has one wall completely covered with her own witch doctor paraphernalia and off to the side a very large framed picture of "The Last Supper—*The Last Supper.*"



She asked me to tell you that she herself was sick for three years. She was bedridden for three years until finally she accepted this spirit. "These personalities," she said. "There might be a slight clash in beliefs, but don't worry about that." She said as long as I told you the truth, there was nothing to worry about. She at the moment is training a very interesting Twaser apprentice who is half bush, half Kalahari bush and half Sotho who was a very powerful diviner. She has seen the photograph of the first sangoma that I showed you, the one that officiated at my initiation, and she herself wants to go through the twelfth level training. Around Johannesburg there are no sangomas that are qualified themselves in this twelfth level, and obviously you can't train another unless you are. But she came to me with a dream and she said, "I saw, in my dream, that picture of Risibe the first witch doctor and now I must tell you where I saw her." And she described in greatest detail that range of mountains which I showed you right in the beginning, the range of mountains that I went and lived in. She described in great detail down to the number of caves and a particular valley which is a very striking valley, and she told me exactly where this old woman lived, and that she has to go there. So when I get back, I have been asked to take out a number of them including her on a herb-collecting expedition, and she is going to go to this woman for further training.

It is interesting that quite regardless of whatever tribe you might be, if you are afflicted with this spirit, you will be led to a witch doctor, and quite regardless, be it black, white or yellow—it doesn't matter what tribe you belong to—they must accept you and they must train you. I have just been put onto another European, the only other one I know that has been accepted by sangomas, although he hasn't undergone initiation, and when he goes into trance state, he speaks Zulu which he can't speak a word of normally.

My teacher at the moment, although she is Zulu, when she goes into trance states, she speaks Tonga, which is found in Mozambique and which very few people speak—one of the early Bantu languages, and therefore it's quite difficult to follow a large number of them in this trance state.

SKINNER: I have a number of questions. You have referred several times to the democracy in terms of training. Could I be trained? If I go there, could I be trained by this woman?

BOSHIER: As I said, this depends on you.

SKINNER: You mean the South African government will give me a visa to do anthropological research in Soweto.

BOSHIER: I would say that you would probably have far more difficulty with the sangomas than with the South African government.



SKINNER: No, I'm not talking about that. You see, I must get a visa in New York before I go to South Africa, so we must put this into total perspective before one talks about the democracy. I know that there might be problems on a psychological level between myself and the sangoma.

BOSHIER: But what you want to know is, acceptance on a government level?

SKINNER: Could I get into that society?

BOSHIER: I'm afraid I had the same kind of experience as you had. I'm afraid I'm not qualified to answer that. All I can tell you is that I came out of England, went out to South Africa and went out, as I was told by them here, because my spirits so decreed I would go out. I had no difficulty at all. I went into the African areas. I today get permits from the South African government.

SKINNER: To actually work in Soweto.

BOSHIER: To work in Soweto. To work in all the African reserves. They know that I'm working on witch doctors, and they're not banned by law—witch doctors may practice. I have encountered no difficulty whatsoever. I might mention one other thing, and that is that the research assistant who was being sponsored up until this month by the Parapsychology Foundation—I mentioned she hails from Massachusetts—she has had no difficulty whatsoever in going.

SKINNER: What is her name?

BOSHIER: Costello. I got the permits for her, but she has had no difficulty whatsoever in going into Soweto.

SKINNER: My second question: You've gone through an apprenticeship. What are your powers of the function of your brain? Could you tell us something about that?

BOSHIER: You mean mine personally?

SKINNER: Yes. Because you've gone through this after all, and there are thought waves as you've reported. You may have gone through the first one. What is the outward and visible sign of an interior accomplishment?

BOSHIER: Well, as I say, one is afflicted with shamanistic-like illness which is usually some sort of mental illness; some medics call it epilepsy. I had a case six weeks ago of an African girl who was actually certified. I managed to get the authorities who came to me to rescind this decision and to release her. They passed her over to me and I passed her over to witch



doctors and she continues to go into these epileptic-like states, but she has been trained now to utilize them, and if you go to her, having lost something for instance, she will go into exactly this sort of state. She might flop onto the ground and she might foam at the mouth. I must admit that I personally have gone through some of these things.

SKINNER: Professor Dingwall, you talked about the anthropologists during this last presentation, and the question is the nature of the relationship with so-called primitives. Rather than considering yourself primitive-like, is it possible that you can consider the people also sophisticated, so that this might be a way of explaining their relationship to you? A kind of sophistication that appears as a function of their humanity, their cordiality in their attempt to establish rapport with a visitor?

DINGWALL: You have to enter, I think, into their sophistication.

LEWIS: I want to ask one or two factual questions, please. Could you tell us a bit about the nature of the spirits that you've encountered, or at least that your colleagues have encountered and in particular about possible European spirits or Indian spirits and the role which people you've been working with cast them in?

BOSHIER: Almost always as ancestors. They will, of course, sit around in the morning and always discuss their dreams, and it is here that a young person who might have this ukutwasa, these symptoms which suggest this person should be trained, will discuss with his or her family these visitations which they get and describe them in great detail. They have very lucid conversations with them and it is then that a grandmother or mother might identify these spirits as an ancestral one, and will give the name. Now this is important. It's being used in this particular study, of course, for tracing back genealogies. The man I mentioned, with whom I went to the ancient mines, while out there at the mines, he prayed to his ancestors, and he was able to go back thirteen generations by men giving each name going back to his grandfather's line, and he was able to describe to me each one of these spirits. On the spirit of the thirteenth ancestor he directs his prayer to all of those ancestors who went before and whom he cannot identify, would they in turn pass this particular prayer or thanksgiving or whatever it is, on to God. They believe in one supreme god. They believe, however, that it is extremely unlikely that one can speak to God directly. Now in African culture, of course, you find this in many ways. You may not go and speak to a chief directly. He has an intermediary, and God has intermediaries and these are the spirits, our ancestors' spirits, and they describe them in great detail, male or female.



LEWIS: Yes it's very familiar, of course, in Catholicism. But what I wanted to ask specifically was, did you encounter any specifically—that is, any spirits which were specifically identified as being of European origin and not African origin? Or, if you like, of Indian origin.

BOSHIER: Not Indian, but yes, European.

LEWIS: Can you tell us anything about the role they had or their characteristics which would distinguish them from their ancestors that you seemed to be talking about yesterday.

BOSHIER: No difference whatsoever. You can be guided by these people. There was a very interesting case. When I took a Swazi sangoma with whom we were working (she is now on her second level of training), I took her with Miss Costello (the American girl) some three hundred miles north of Johannesburg to a cave, which is fairly famous in South African history—a large battle was fought between an African tribe and the first European intruders there. Now I didn't tell them the name of the cave. I was interested in what change her dreams might have in this environment and we recorded this—we had a tape recorder which we switched on the first thing in the morning—and she recorded a dream the night she was visited by both European and African spirits, and she repeated very much the sort of story which I mentioned yesterday. That is, on the spirit level, there is no distinction at all. You may have a black or a white spirit, and although they will agree that although there might be a difference between us living as we do in normal reality here today, on the spirit side there is no difference whatsoever, no distinction at all.

LEWIS: You haven't encountered anyone possessed by the spirit of the present prime minister of South Africa?

BOSHIER: No.

LEWIS: Thank you.

BRIER: Now, Professor Smith.

SMITH: I wanted to comment on the need to be primitive in order to make contact with primitives. I wondered about what is the nature of being primitive. I think it is simply being human, but being human in a sophisticated but also in a very elemental way, and to have real and deep respect for one's self and other human beings; or if you are a physicist, you have deep respect for physical things. This is the most essential instrument. If you are arrogant, you can be as clever as possible, but you have shut yourself out from that much knowledge. If you have deep respect. . .



BOSHIER: Humility. . .

SMITH: Yes, humility, but not obsequiousness. . .

BOSHIER: Yes, definitely not.

BRIER: Van de Castle?

VAN DE CASTLE: Just a comment. In my opinion, this has been the best paper presented at the conference. This is exactly what I had hoped would be emerging from this conference: an account from somebody who had gone out into the field, had learned to speak the language, had lived with the people, and who was a trained observer who could document what happens in the field and who was open to a possible parapsychological explanation for the events observed. The question from parapsychologists is: does psi occur in primitive settings? From the accounts you've been giving us about the series of tests and examinations that candidates have to go through in terms of hiding the goat and hiding other objects, it seems that an encouraging answer can be given to that question. Maybe I'm speaking out of turn, but if there is any question of support from the Parapsychology Foundation, I would yield my own financial support to the support of this work, because it's far more relevant and important than that of anybody else that I see seated around this table.

BOSHIER: Well, I can't agree, but thank you very much. One thing I'd like to mention if I may, and that is this particular Zulu who I showed you at the end, the daughter of the Methodist minister—and Professor Dingwall might be interested in this—asked me if I knew a man called Jesus Christ, and I said, "Well, I've heard of him, sure." And she said, "Well, he is a Sangoma. Didn't he walk out in the wilderness and didn't he do all the things we had to do?" This might interest you. As far as she was concerned, Jesus Christ was a sangoma, and I asked her what a sangoma is and she said, "All people have the spirit, but some people are given a much more powerful spirit, and Jesus Christ had a very powerful one." I see Professor Bharati is not here. I wanted to reply to him. He mentioned the feeling out in tribal parts of India regarding the astronauts. I had a case with a witch doctor—of course, there are many forms, many types of witch doctor. There is the sort of hex death, as we discussed, and there are above all, especially in a drought-stricken place like southern Africa, rain doctors. I asked the group with whom I was working what they thought of the astronauts—this was the time of the first successful moon shot. They said they had heard about it and they could possibly believe it, but they were in great fear and dread of it because they couldn't expect any rain the next season because as



we all knew, this was where the rain came from, the moon. The sun and the moon operate the rain. Well, it so happened that we had very good rains that year and when I went back to them and asked them how they could explain this, they said, "Well you didn't tell us he was a Moroki," which means rain doctor. As far as they were concerned, the astronauts were rain doctors.

BRIER: Benson Herbert.

HERBERT: I have a question first, regarding the story about these two bones that this witch doctor threw and kept on throwing, and one bone indicated you were underground and indicated danger with the leopard. I'd like to ask, in your experience, what actually takes place? She has the bones in her hand and throws the bones?

BOSHIER: Yes. These divining bones should traditionally be made of ivory. Following the directions of the spirits, which means you will walk down to, in this case, both oceans, the Indian and the Atlantic Ocean—you will walk to certain mounts and certain rivers, and in these wanderings (and this is why they assumed that I was training) you kill animals, and from a female impala you take a small knuckle bone; from the male impala, you take a small knuckle bone; from a lion or just about any animal you can mention, they do likewise. Then they have a huge set of bones which they can barely hold in two hands. They split them in two; they breathe on them (which is putting the Moroki's breath into the bones to make them talk), and then they simply throw them on the floor.

HERBERT: Have you done any experiments by throwing the bones in some random fashion, some mechanical fashion, so you could not unconsciously control these bones with your hands?

BOSHIER: I find myself in a very difficult position for this sort of testing.

HERBERT: I have an institute in South Africa which is very anxious to apply EEG tests, among others, to these witch doctors.

BOSHIER: Quite honestly we haven't done it yet. Obviously we have to because of scientific demands, but I haven't.

BRIER: Mrs. Haynes, is it?

HAYNES: I have just a very small question. A friend of mine is being adopted as the grandmother of a tribe. She's white. She's a writer.

BOSHIER: What's her name?



HAYNES: Naomi Richardson.

BOSHIER: Oh, yes, I know.

HAYNES: She has had one dream during illness of being visited. Does this question of adoption into a tribe overrule actual blood relationship?

BOSHIER: Yes.

HAYNES: Will she become a tribal ancestress in her time?

BOSHIER: She could. It does overrule blood relationship in many cases.

SKINNER: I know the wife of someone who is working among the Yoruba in western Nigeria. Apparently she has gone through the same process as you have. I think she has gone farther through the process. Are you familiar at all with her?

BOSHIER: No, I'm not.

SKINNER: You might be interested to establish contact.

BOSHIER: I must mention there are different initiations. The initiation into the tribe, of course, doesn't have anything to do necessarily with a witch doctor; they are separate.