WITCHCRAFT, ORACLES
AND MAGIC AMONG THE
AZANDE

BY

E. E. EVANS-PRITCHARD
M.A. (Oxon.), Ph.D. (London)
RESEARCH LECTURER IN AFRICAN SOCIOLOGY AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
SOMETIME PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY AT THE
EGYPTIAN UNIVERSITY, CAIRO

WITH A FOREWORD BY
PROFESSOR C. G. SELIGMAN F.R.S.

OXFORD
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS

1937
MAP SHOWING APPROXIMATE AREA OCCUPIED BY AZANDE OR SUBJECT TO ZANDE INFLUENCE
INTRODUCTORY

CHAPTER I

MANNER IN WHICH THE BOOK IS WRITTEN

I

If I seem to have been overlong in publishing a monograph on Zande culture I would plead that I have done my best to write preliminary and partial accounts of Zande customs during the intervals between my expeditions. Other obligations have deprived me of leisure for writing a comprehensive account. I considered it small return for many a kindness to work up my notes on a number of tribes so that they might be at the disposal of Professor and Mrs. Seligman when writing their work on the pagan tribes of the Nilotic Sudan. Moreover, I was invited by the Sudan Government to make an ethnological investigation of the Nuer nation. I felt in honour bound to accept this invitation, though the commencement of a new piece of intensive research before my previous research was published, or even written up in manuscript, was a hazardous proceeding. I then spent over two years in Egypt, where a great part of what leisure I had from my university duties was devoted to a study of the desert. At the conclusion of my residence in Egypt I embarked on a further ethnological expedition to the Southern Sudan and Western Abyssinia as a Leverhulme Research Fellow. These are the reasons for a ten years' interval between the commencement of my work and the publication of this volume.

I must mention some difficulties which have arisen in its preparation. I had to decide whether it were wiser to use native terms or to avoid them. When I lived among Azande and studied the magic art I was acquainted with a great number of names of trees and plants and their ritual uses; but a knowledge which is essential to the field-worker may be an unnecessary burden to the student. The objections to reproducing these names in a book intended for European readers outweigh the minute accuracy which is sacrificed by their deletion, so that as a rule I have used Zande words only when I am introducing an
important magical operation for the first time or when it is inevitable that a Zande name for a tree or plant be used in ignorance of its scientific name.¹

Likewise I have translated freely the Zande texts in which much of my information was recorded, since I consider it of greater importance that the meaning of the sentences should be clear than that an exact rendering of each word into English be maintained. Readers will therefore have to take my translations on trust, but were I to give them the native texts together with literal translations they would be, all but a few, equally helpless. When possible I have written my account in the words of Azande because texts not only give us information about their customs but also show us how Azande themselves describe them. However, texts are not sacred. The evidence recorded in them has no more weight than that recorded in my own words. Therefore I have not hesitated to delete in them what is not relevant to the situation in which they are used. I hope one day to publish them in Zande.

One type of human behaviour is related to other types, and it is therefore desirable in describing one type to refer to all the others in so far as it is directly dependent on them or they on it. Since magic and rites connected with witchcraft and oracles may be performed in association with any social activity they have manifold interconnexions. In writing about Zande mystical beliefs and ritual practices, must I therefore describe the whole of Zande social life? In describing agricultural and hunting magic, must I give a complete account of these economic activities, and in mentioning magic for singing and dancing, must I describe song and dance? I think not. Everything in the world is ultimately related to everything else, but unless we make abstractions we cannot even commence to study phenomena. My object in this book is not to describe in full every social situation in which magic, oracles, and witchcraft are found, but to study the relations of these practices and beliefs to one another, to show how they form an ideational system, and to inquire how this system is expressed in social behaviour. If any one were to urge that in discussing magic

¹ When I have given a scientific name it is generally taken from Flora of the Sudan by A. F. Brown and R. E. Massey, 1929.
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I have made a partial abstraction of the activities with which it is associated, I would reply that I am dealing with only some of its relations. It would be grotesque to describe Zande economic life in a book on Zande magic, oracles, and witchcraft, since agriculture, hunting, and collecting are not functions of these beliefs and rites, but the beliefs and rites are functions of agriculture, hunting, and collecting.

Some may think that I would have been wiser to have described first what are sometimes considered to be the foundations of culture: family and kinship organization, regulation of public life, and production of food and tools. I agree that it might have been better had I done so, but in the early stages of my work I became interested in the subjects described in this book and found it easy to collect information about them. Others may wonder why no account of Zande religion is included, since magic and religion are generally grouped together in theoretical discussions. It is true that they have qualities in common, but the Zande cult of the dead is bound up with activities of the family, and belief in a Supreme Being is amalgamated with belief in ghosts, so that Zande religion will more fitly be described in connexion with domestic life. I have not included more than a few introductory notes on Zande institutions other than those dealt with in this book because the writings of other students in the same field and contributions by myself in a number of scientific journals are accessible to those who need a fuller background than this book provides. Moreover, Professor and Mrs. Seligman had the full use of my material in writing in their Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan just such a chapter as might be thought needful here. I am preparing an account of Zande family life and political institutions. A description of the conditions in which my research was carried out and of the methods I employed will be included in this second volume.
CHAPTER I

Witchcraft is an Organic and Hereditary Phenomenon

Azande believe that some people are witches and can injure them in virtue of an inherent quality. A witch performs no rite, utters no spell, and possesses no medicines. An act of witchcraft is a psychic act. They believe also that sorcerers may do them ill by performing magic rites with bad medicines. Azande distinguish clearly between witches and sorcerers. Against both they employ diviners, oracles, and medicines. The relations between these beliefs and rites are the subject of this book.

I describe witchcraft first because it is an indispensable background to the other beliefs. When Azande consult oracles they consult them mainly about witches. When they employ diviners it is for the same purpose. Their leechcraft and closed associations are directed against the same foe.

I had no difficulty in discovering what Azande think about witchcraft, nor in observing what they do to combat it. These ideas and actions are on the surface of their life and are accessible to anyone who lives for a few weeks in their homesteads. Every Zande is an authority on witchcraft. There is no need to consult specialists. There is not even need to question Azande about it, for information flows freely from recurrent situations in their social life, and one has only to watch and listen. Mangu, witchcraft, was one of the first words I heard in Zandelaland, and I heard it uttered day by day throughout the months.

Azande believe that witchcraft is a substance in the bodies of witches, a belief which is found among many peoples in Central and West Africa. Zandelaland is the north-eastern limit of its distribution. It is difficult to say with what organ Azande associate witchcraft. I have never seen human witchcraft-substance, but it has been described to me as an oval blackish swelling or bag in which various small objects are sometimes found.
When Azande describe its shape they often point to the elbow of their bent arm, and when they describe its location they point to just beneath the xiphoid cartilage which is said to 'cover witchcraft-substance'. They say:

It is attached to the edge of the liver. When people cut open the belly they have only to pierce it and witchcraft-substance bursts through with a pop.

I have heard people say that it is of a reddish colour and contains seeds of pumpkins and sesame and other food-plants which have been devoured by a witch in the cultivations of his neighbours. Azande know the position of witchcraft-substance because in the past it was sometimes extracted by autopsy. I believe it to be the small intestine in certain digestive periods. This organ is suggested by Zande descriptions of autopsies and was that shown to me as containing witchcraft-substance in the belly of one of my goats.

A witch shows no certain external symptoms of his condition though people say: 'One knows a witch by his red eyes.'

Witchcraft is not only a physical trait but is also inherited. It is transmitted by unilinear descent from parent to child. The sons of a male witch are all witches but his daughters are not, while the daughters of a female witch are all witches but her sons are not. Biological transmission of witchcraft from one parent to all children of the same sex is complementary to Zande opinions about procreation and to their eschatological beliefs. Conception is thought to be due to a unison of psychical properties in man and woman. When the soul of the man is stronger a boy will be born; when the soul of the woman is stronger a girl will be born. Thus a child partakes of the psychical qualities of both parents, though a girl is thought to partake more of the soul of her mother and a boy of the soul of his father. Nevertheless in certain respects a child takes after one or other parent according to its sex, namely, in the inheritance of sexual characters, of a body-soul, and of witchcraft-substance. There is a vague belief, hardly precise enough to be described as a doctrine, that man possesses two souls, a body-soul and a spirit-soul. At death the body-soul becomes a totem animal of the
clan while its fellow soul becomes a ghost and leads a shadowy existence at the heads of streams. Many people say that the body-soul of a man becomes the totem animal of his father's clan while the body-soul of a woman becomes the totem animal of her mother's clan.

At first sight it seems strange to find a mode of matrilineal transmission in a society which is characterized by its strong patrilineal bias, but witchcraft like the body-soul is part of the body and might be expected to accompany inheritance of male or female characters from father or mother.

To our minds it appears evident that if a man is proven a witch the whole of his clan are *ipsa facto* witches, since the Zande clan is a group of persons related biologically to one another through the male line. Azande see the sense of this argument but they do not accept its conclusions, and it would involve the whole notion of witchcraft in contradiction were they to do so. In practice they regard only close paternal kinsmen of a known witch as witches. It is only in theory that they extend the imputation to all a witch's clansmen. If in the eyes of the world payment for homicide by witchcraft stamps the kin of a guilty man as witches, a post-mortem in which no witchcraft-substance is discovered in a man clears his paternal kin of suspicion. Here again we might reason that if a man be found by post-mortem immune from witchcraft-substance all his clan must also be immune, but Azande do not act as though they were of this opinion.

Further elaborations of belief free Azande from having to admit what appear to us to be the logical consequences of belief in biological transmission of witchcraft. If a man is proven a witch beyond all doubt his kin, to establish their innocence, may use the very biological principle which would seem to involve them in disrepute. They admit that the man is a witch but deny that he is a member of their clan. They say he was a bastard, for among Azande a man is always of the clan of his *genitor* and not of his *pater*, and I was told that they may compel his mother if she is still alive to say who was her lover, beating her and asking her, 'What do you mean by going to the bush to get witchcraft in adultery?' More often they simply make the declaration that the witch must have been a bastard since they have no witchcraft in their bodies and that he could not
therefore be one of their kinsmen, and they may support this contention by quoting cases where members of their kin have been shown by autopsy to have been free from witchcraft. It is unlikely that other people will accept this plea, but they are not asked either to accept it or reject it.

Also Zande doctrine includes the notion that even if a man is the son of a witch and has witchcraft-substance in his body he may not use it. It may remain inoperative, 'cool' as the Azande say, throughout his lifetime, and a man can hardly be classed as a witch if his witchcraft never functions. In point of fact, therefore, Azande generally regard witchcraft as an individual trait and it is treated as such in spite of its association with kinship. At the same time certain clans had a reputation for witchcraft in the reign of King Gbudwe. No one thinks any worse of a man if he is a member of one of these clans.

Azande do not perceive the contradiction as we perceive it because they have no theoretical interest in the subject, and those situations in which they express their beliefs in witchcraft do not force the problem upon them. A man never asks the oracles, which alone are capable of disclosing the location of witchcraft-substance in the living, whether a certain man is a witch. He asks whether at the moment this man is bewitching him. One attempts to discover whether a man is bewitching someone in particular circumstances and not whether he is born a witch. If the oracles say that a certain man is injuring you at the moment you then know that he is a witch, whereas if they say that at the moment he is not injuring you you do not know whether he is a witch or not and have no interest in inquiring into the matter. If he is a witch it is of no significance to you so long as you are not his victim. A Zande is interested in witchcraft only as an agent on definite occasions and in relation to his own interests, and not as a permanent condition of individuals. When he is sick he does not normally say: 'Now let us consider who are well-known witches of the neighbourhood and place their names before the poison oracle.' He does not consider the question in this light but asks himself who among his neighbours have grudges against him and then seeks to know from the poison oracle whether one of them is on this particular occasion bewitching him. Azande are interested solely in the dynamics of witchcraft in particular situations.
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Lesser misfortunes are soon forgotten and those who caused them are looked upon by the sufferer and his kin as having bewitched someone on this occasion rather than as confirmed witches, for only persons who are constantly exposed by the oracles as responsible for sickness or loss are regarded as confirmed witches, and in the old days it was only when a witch had killed someone that he became a marked man in the community.

III

Death is due to witchcraft and must be avenged. All other practices connected with witchcraft are epitomized in the action of vengeance. In our present context it will be sufficient to point out that in pre-European days vengeance was either executed directly, sometimes by the slaughter of a witch, and sometimes by acceptance of compensation, or by means of lethal magic. Witches were very seldom slain, for it was only when a man committed a second or third murder, or murdered an important person, that a prince permitted his execution. Under British rule the magical method alone is employed.

Vengeance seems to have been less a result of anger and hatred than the fulfilment of a pious duty and a source of profit. I have never heard that today the kin of a dead man, once they have exacted vengeance, show any rancour towards the family of the man whom their magic has struck down, nor that in the past there was any prolonged hostility between the kin of the dead and the kin of the witch who had paid compensation for his murder. Today if a man kills a person by witchcraft the crime is his sole responsibility and his kin are not associated with his guilt. In the past they assisted him to pay compensation, not in virtue of collective responsibility, but in virtue of social obligations to a kinsman. His relatives-in-law and his blood-brothers also contributed towards the payment. As soon as a witch is today slain by magic, or in the past had been speared to death or had paid compensation, the affair is closed. Moreover, it is an issue between the kin of the dead and the kin of the witch and other people are not concerned with it. They have the same social links with both parties.

It is extremely difficult today to obtain information about victims of vengeance-magic. Azande themselves do not know
about them unless they are members of a murdered man's closest kin. One notices that his kinsmen are no longer observing taboos of mourning and one knows by this that their magic has performed its task, but it is useless to inquire from them who was its victim because they will not tell you. It is their private affair and is a secret between them and their prince who must be informed of the action of their magic since it is necessary for his poison oracle to confirm their poison oracle before they are permitted to end their mourning. Besides, it is a verdict of the poison oracle and one must not disclose its revelations about such matters.

If other people were acquainted with the names of those who have fallen victims to avenging magic the whole procedure of vengeance would be exposed as futile. If it were known that the death of a man X had been avenged upon a witch Y then the whole procedure would be reduced to an absurdity because the death of Y is also avenged by his kinsmen upon a witch Z. Some Azande have indeed explained to me their doubts about the honesty of the princes who control the oracles, and a few have seen that the present-day system is fallacious. At any rate, its fallaciousness is veiled so long as everybody concerned keeps silence about the victims of their vengeance-magic. In the past things were different, for then a person accused by the prince's oracles of having killed another by witchcraft either paid immediate compensation or was killed. In either case the matter was closed because the man who had paid compensation had no means of proving that he was not a witch, and if he were killed at the prince's orders his death could not be avenged. Nor was an autopsy permitted on his corpse to discover whether it contained witchcraft-substance.

When I have challenged Azande to defend their system of vengeance they have generally said that a prince whose oracles declare that Y has died from the magic of X's kinsmen will not place the name of Z before his oracles to discover whether he died from the magic of Y's kinsmen. When Y's kinsmen ask their prince to place Z's name before his poison oracle he will decline to do so and will tell them that he knows Y to have died in expiation of a crime and that his death cannot therefore be avenged. A few Azande explained the present system by saying that perhaps vengeance-magic and witchcraft participate
in causing death. The part of the vengeance-magic explains the termination of mourning of one family and the part of witchcraft explains the initiation of vengeance by another family, i.e. they seek to explain a contradiction in their beliefs in the mystical idiom of the beliefs themselves. But I have only been offered this explanation as a general and theoretical possibility in reply to my objections. Since the names of victims of vengeance are kept secret the contradiction is not apparent, for it would only be evident if all deaths were taken into consideration and not any one particular death. So long therefore as they are able to conform to custom and maintain family honour Azande are not interested in the broader aspects of vengeance in general. They saw the objection when I raised it but they were not incommodated by it.

Princes must be aware of the contradiction because they know the outcome of every death in their provinces. When I asked Prince Gàngura how he accepted the death of a man both as the action of vengeance-magic and of witchcraft he smiled and admitted that all was not well with the present-day system. Some princes said that they did not allow a man to be avenged if they knew he had died from vengeance-magic, but I think they were lying. One cannot know for certain, for even if a prince were to tell the kin of a dead man that he had died from vengeance-magic and might not be avenged he would tell them in secret and they would keep his words a secret. They would pretend to their neighbours that they were avenging their kinsmen and after some months would hang up the barkcloth of mourning as a sign that vengeance was accomplished, for they would not wish people to know that their kinsman was a witch.

Consequently if the kinsmen of A avenge his death by magic on B and then learn that B’s kinsmen have ceased mourning in sign of having accomplished vengeance also, they believe that this second vengeance is a pretence. Contradiction is thereby avoided.

IV

Being part of the body, witchcraft-substance grows as the body grows. The older a witch the more potent his witchcraft and the more unscrupulous its use. This is one of the reasons why
Azande often express apprehension of old persons. The witchcraft-substance of a child is so small that it can do little injury to others. Therefore a child is never accused of murder, and even grown boys and girls are not suspected of serious witchcraft though they may cause minor misfortunes to persons of their own age. We shall see later how witchcraft operates when there is ill-feeling between witch and victim, and ill-feeling is unlikely to arise frequently between children and adults. Only adults can consult the poison oracle and they do not normally put the names of children before it when asking it about witchcraft. Children cannot express their enmities and minor misfortunes in terms of oracular revelations about witchcraft because they cannot consult the poison oracle.

Nevertheless, rare cases have been known in which, after asking the oracle in vain about all suspected adults, a child's name has been put before it and he has been declared a witch. But I was told that if this happens an old man will point out that there must be an error. He will say: 'A witch has taken the child and placed him in front of himself as a screen to protect himself.'

Children soon know about witchcraft, and I have found in talking to little boys and girls, even as young as six years of age, that they apprehend what is meant when their elders speak of it. I was told that in a quarrel one child may bring up the bad reputation of the father of another. However, people do not comprehend the nature of witchcraft till they are used to operating oracles, to acting in situations of misfortune in accordance with oracular revelations, and to making magic. The concept grows with the social experience of each individual.

Men and women are equally witches. Men may be bewitched by other men or by women, but women are generally bewitched only by members of their own sex. A sick man usually asks the oracles about his male neighbours, while if he is consulting them about a sick wife or kinswoman he normally asks about other women. This is because ill-feeling is more likely to arise between man and man and between woman and woman than between man and woman. A man comes in contact only with his wives and kinswomen and has therefore little opportunity to incur the hatred of other women. It would, in fact, be suspicious if he consulted the oracles about another man’s wife on his own
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behalf, and her husband might surmise adultery. He would wonder what contact his wife had had with her accuser that had led to disagreement between them. Nevertheless, a man frequently consults the oracles about his own wives, because he is sure to displease them from time to time, and often they hate him. I have never heard of cases in which a man has been accused of bewitching his wife. Azande say that no man would do such a thing as no one wishes to kill his wife or cause her sickness since he would himself be the chief loser. Kuagbiaru told me that he had never known a man to pay compensation for the death of his wife. Another reason why one does not hear of fowls’ wings being presented to husbands in accusation of witchcraft on account of the illnesses of their wives is that a woman cannot herself consult the poison oracle and usually entrusts this task to her husband. She may ask her brother to consult the oracle on her behalf, but he is not likely to place his brother-in-law’s name before it because a husband does not desire the death of his wife.

I have never known a case in which a man has been bewitched by a kinswoman or in which a woman has been bewitched by a kinsman. Moreover, I have heard of only one case in which a man was bewitched by a kinsman. A kinsman may do a man wrong in other ways but he would not bewitch him. It is evident that a sick man would not care to ask the oracles about his brothers and paternal cousins, because if the poison oracle declared them to have bewitched him, by the same declaration he would himself be a witch, since witchcraft is inherited in the male line.

Members of the princely class, the Avongara, are not accused of witchcraft, for if a man were to say that the oracles had declared the son of a prince to have bewitched him he would be asserting that the king and princes were also witches. However much a prince may detest members of his lineage he never allows them to be brought into disrepute by a commoner. Hence, although Azande will tell one privately that they believe some members of the noble class may be witches, they seldom consult

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1 It is customary, when witchcraft is suspected, to ask the local prince, or more often his deputy, to send a fowl’s wing to the presumed witch, courteously requesting him to blow water upon it from his mouth in token of goodwill towards the injured person; cf. pp. 40–42. Sending a fowl’s wing to someone is therefore tantamount to an accusation of witchcraft.
the oracles about them, so that they are not accused of witchcraft. In the past they never consulted the oracles about them. There is an established fiction that Avongara are not witches, and it is maintained by the overwhelming power and prestige of the ruling princes.

Governors of provinces, deputies of districts, men of the court, leaders of military companies, and other commoners of position and wealth are not likely to be accused of witchcraft unless by a prince himself on account of his own hunting or on account of the death of some equally influential commoner. Generally lesser people do not dare to consult the oracles about influential persons because their lives would be a misery if they insulted the most important men in their neighbourhood. So we may say that the incidence of witchcraft in a Zande community falls equally upon both sexes in the commoner class while nobles are entirely, and powerful commoners largely, immune from accusations. All children are normally free from suspicion.

The relations of ruling princes to witchcraft are peculiar. Though immune from accusations they believe in witches as firmly as other people, and they constantly consult the poison oracle to find out who is bewitching them. They especially consult it about their wives. A prince’s oracle is also the final authority which decides on all witchcraft cases involving homicide, and in the past it was also used to protect his subjects from witchcraft during warfare. When a lesser noble dies his death is attributed to a witch and is avenged in the same way as deaths of commoners, but the death of a king or ruling prince is not so avenged and is generally attributed to sorcery or other evil agents of a mystical nature.

While witchcraft itself is part of the human organism its action is psychic. What Azande call *mbisimo mangu*, the soul of witchcraft, is a concept that bridges over the distance between the person of the witch and the person of his victim. Some such explanation is necessary to account for the fact that a witch was in his hut at the time when he is supposed to have injured someone. The soul of witchcraft may leave its corporeal home at any time during the day or night, but Azande generally
think of a witch sending his soul on errands by night when his victim is asleep. It sails through the air emitting a bright light. During the daytime this light can only be seen by witches, and by witch-doctors when they are primed with medicines, but anyone may have the rare misfortune to observe it at night. Azande say that the light of witchcraft is like the gleam of fire-fly beetles, only it is ever so much larger and brighter than they. They also say that a man may see witchcraft as it goes to rest on branches for 'Witchcraft is like fire, it lights a light'. If a man sees the light of witchcraft he picks up a piece of charcoal and throws it under his bed so that he may not suffer misfortune from the sight.

I have only once seen witchcraft on its path. I had been sitting late in my hut writing notes. About midnight, before retiring, I took a spear and went for my usual nocturnal stroll. I was walking in the garden at the back of my hut, amongst banana trees, when I noticed a bright light passing at the back of my servants' huts towards the homestead of a man called Tupoi. As this seemed worth investigation I followed its passage until a grass screen obscured the view. I ran quickly through my hut to the other side in order to see where the light was going to, but did not regain sight of it. I knew that only one man, a member of my household, had a lamp that might have given off so bright a light, but next morning he told me that he had neither been out late at night nor had he used his lamp. There did not lack ready informants to tell me that what I had seen was witchcraft. Shortly afterwards, on the same morning, an old relative of Tupoi and an inmate of his homestead died. This event fully explained the light I had seen. I never discovered its real origin, which was possibly a handful of grass lit by someone on his way to defecate, but the coincidence of the direction along which the light moved and the subsequent death accorded well with Zande ideas.

This light is not the witch in person stalking his prey but is an emanation from his body. On this point Zande opinion is quite decided. The witch is on his bed, but he has dispatched the soul of his witchcraft to remove the psychical part of his victim's organs, his *mbisimo pasio*, the soul of his flesh, which he and his fellow witches will devour. The whole act of vampirism is an incorporeal one: the soul of witchcraft removes the soul of the organ. I have not been able to obtain a precise
explanation of what is meant by the soul of witchcraft and the
soul of an organ. Azande know that people are killed in this
way, but only a witch himself could give an exact account of
what happens in the process.

Azande use the same word in describing the psychical parts
of witchcraft-substance and other organs as they use for what
we call the soul of a man. Anything the action of which is not
subject to the senses may likewise be explained by the existence
of a soul. Medicines act by means of their soul, an explanation
which covers the void between a magical rite and the achieve-
ment of its purpose. The poison oracle also has a soul, which
accounts for its power to see what a man cannot see.

The action of witchcraft is therefore not subject to the ordi-

nary conditions which limit most objects of daily use, but its
activity is thought to be limited to some extent by conditions
of space. Witchcraft does not strike a man at a great distance,
but only injures people in the vicinity. If a man leaves the dis-

trict in which he is living when attacked by witchcraft it will
not follow him far. Witchcraft needs, moreover, conscious
direction. The witch cannot send out his witchcraft and leave
it to find its victim for itself, but he must define its objective
and determine its route. Hence a sick man can often elude its
further ravages by withdrawing to the shelter of a grass hut in
the bush unknown to all but his wife and children. The witch
will dispatch his witchcraft after his victim and it will search
his homestead in vain and return to its owner.

Likewise, a man will leave a homestead before dawn in order
to escape witchcraft, because then witches are asleep and will
not observe his departure. When they become aware that he
has left he will already be out of range of their witchcraft. If,
on the other hand, they see him starting they may bewitch him
and some misfortune will befall him on his journey or after his
return home. It is because witchcraft is believed to act only at
a short range that if a wife falls sick on a visit to her parents’
home they search for the responsible witch there and not at
her husband’s home, and if she dies in her parents’ home her
husband may hold them responsible because they have not pro-
tected her by consulting the oracles about her welfare.

The farther removed a man’s homestead from his neighbours
the safer he is from witchcraft. When Azande of the Anglo-
Egyptian Sudan were compelled to live in roadside settlements they did so with profound misgivings, and many fled to the Belgian Congo rather than face close contact with their neighbours. Azandes say that their dislike of living in close proximity to others is partly due to a desire to place a stretch of country between their wives and possible lovers and partly to their belief that a witch can injure the more severely the nearer he is to his victim.

The Zande verb ‘to bewitch’ is no, and in its only other uses we translate this word ‘to shoot’. It is used for shooting with bow and arrow or with a gun. By a jerk of a leg witch-doctors will shoot (no) pieces of bone into one another at a distance. We may notice the analogy between these different shootings and their common factor, the act of causing injury at a distance.

VI

In speaking of witches and witchcraft it is necessary to explain that Azande normally think of witchcraft quite impersonally and apart from any particular witch or witches. When a man says he cannot live in a certain place because of witchcraft he means that he has been warned against this spot by the oracles. The oracles have told him that if he lives there he will be attacked by witches, and he thinks of this danger as a general danger from witchcraft. Hence he speaks always of mangu, witchcraft. This force does not exist outside individuals; it is, in fact, an organic part of them, but when particular individuals are not specified and no effort is made to identify them, then it must be thought of as a generalized force. Witchcraft means, therefore, some or any witches. When a Zande says about a mishap, ‘It is witchcraft’, he means that it is due to a witch but he does not know to which particular one. In the same way he will say in a magic spell, ‘Let witchcraft die’, meaning whoever may attempt to bewitch him. The concept of witchcraft is not that of an impersonal force that may become attached to persons but of a personal force that is generalized in speech, for if Azande do not particularize they are bound to generalize.

VII

A witch does not immediately destroy his victim. On the contrary, if a man becomes suddenly and acutely ill he may be
sure that he is a victim of sorcery and not of witchcraft. The
effects of witchcraft lead to death by slow stages, for it is only
when a witch has eaten all the soul of a vital organ that death
ensues. This takes time, because he makes frequent visits over
a long period and consumes only a little of the soul of the organ
on each visit, or, if he removes a large portion, he hides it in
the thatch of his hut or in a hole of a tree and eats it bit by
bit. A slow wasting disease is the type of sickness caused by
witchcraft. It may be asked whether Azande consider the con-
sumption of the soul of an organ leads at the same time to its
physical deterioration. They are certainly sometimes of this
opinion. Witches also shoot objects, called *ahu mangu*, things of
witchcraft, into the bodies of those whom they wish to injure.
This leads to pain in the place where the missile is lodged, and
a witch-doctor, in his role of leech, will be summoned to extract
the offending objects, which may be material objects or worms
and grubs.

Witches usually combine in their destructive activities and
subsequent ghoulish feasts. They assist each other in their
criimes and arrange their nefarious schemes in concert. They
possess a special kind of ointment, which, rubbed into their
skins, renders them invisible on nocturnal expeditions, a state-
ment which suggests that witches are sometimes thought to
move in the body to attack their enemies. They also possess
small drums which are beaten to summon them to congress
where their discussions are presided over by old and experi-
enced members of the brotherhood, for there are status and
leadership among witches. Experience must be obtained
under tuition of elder witches before a man is qualified to kill
his neighbours. Growth in experience goes hand in hand with
growth of witchcraft-substance. It is also said that a witch may
not kill a man entirely on his own initiative but must present
his proposals to a meeting of his fellows presided over by a
witch-leader. The question is thrashed out among them.

Sooner or later a witch falls a victim to vengeance or, if he
is clever enough to avoid retribution, is killed by another witch
or by a sorcerer. We may ask whether the distinction between
witches, *aboro mangu*, and those who are not witches, *amokundu,
is maintained beyond the grave? I have never been given a
spontaneous statement to this effect, but in answer to direct and
leading questions I have on one or two occasions been told that when witches die they become evil ghosts (*agirisa*). *Aitoro*, the ordinary ghosts, are benevolent beings, at least as benevolent as a Zande father of a family, and their occasional participation in the world they have left behind them is on the whole orderly and conducive to the welfare of their children. The *agirisa*, on the other hand, show a venomous hatred of humanity. They bedevil travellers in the bush and cause passing states of dis-sociation.

**VIII**

The existence of witchcraft-substance in a living person is known by oracular verdicts. In the dead it is discovered by opening up the belly, and it is this second method of identification that interests us in our account of the physical basis of witchcraft. I have already suggested that the organ in which witchcraft-substance is found is the small intestine.

The conditions in which an autopsy took place in pre-European days are obscure. According to one informant, Gbaru, autopsies were an ancient Mbomu custom, and difficulties only began to arise in Gbudwe’s time. Possibly the practice was an old one which disappeared as political control of the Avongara increased and reappeared with its old vigour after European conquest. King Gbudwe, as I have been told by all informants, discouraged the practice.

However, autopsies were sometimes made when a witch was executed without royal authority. Occasionally kinsmen of a dead man acted on the verdict of their own poison oracle and avenged themselves on a witch without waiting for confirmation from the king’s poison oracle. In such a case their action was *ultra vires*, and if the relatives of the victim of vengeance could show that there was no witchcraft-substance in his belly they could claim compensation in the king’s court from the kin who had taken the law into their own hands. On the other hand, autopsies to clear the good name of a lineage, a member of which had been accused of minor acts of witchcraft not involving payment of damages, may have been fairly frequent even before European conquest, and they were certainly common after it.

A man who had frequently been accused of witchcraft, even
though he were never accused of homicide, would feel that he had been insulted without cause and that the name of his kin had been brought into ill repute. He would therefore sometimes instruct his sons to open his abdomen before burial to ascertain whether these reflections on the honour of his lineage were justified, or he might have the operation performed on a son who had died prematurely. For the Zande mind is logical and inquiring within the framework of its culture and insists on the coherence of its own idiom. If witchcraft is an organic substance its presence can be ascertained by post-mortem search. If it is hereditary it can be discovered in the belly of a close male kinsman of a witch as surely as in the belly of the witch himself.

An autopsy is performed in public at the edge of the grave. Those who attend are relatives of the dead, his relatives-in-law, his friends, his blood-brothers, and old men of standing in the neighbourhood who commonly attend funerals and sit watching the grave-diggers at their labour and other preparations for burial. Many of these old men have been present on similar occasions in the past, and it is they who will decide upon the presence or absence of witchcraft-substance. They can tell its presence by the way the intestines come out of the belly.

Two lateral gashes are made in the belly and one end of the intestines is placed in a cleft branch and they are wound round it. After the other end has been severed from the body another man takes it and unwinds the intestines as he walks away from the man holding the cleft branch. The old men walk alongside the entrails as they are stretched in the air and examine them for witchcraft-substance. The intestines are usually replaced in the belly when the examination is finished and the corpse is buried. I have been told that if no witchcraft-substance were discovered in a man’s belly his kinsmen might strike his accusers in the face with his intestines or might dry them in the sun and afterwards take them to court and there boast of their victory. I have also heard that if witchcraft-substance were discovered the accusers might take the entrails and hang them on a tree bordering one of the main paths leading to a prince’s court.

The cutting and the burial must be performed by a blood-brother, for this is one of the duties of blood-brotherhood. One informant told me that if a man who had not made blood-brotherhood with the kin of the dead person performed the
ceremony he would by so doing become their blood-brother. If witchcraft-substance is found the cutter will have to be paid heavily for his services. Whether there is witchcraft-substance or not he must be ritually cleansed after the operation. He is carried round on the shoulders of a relative of the dead and greeted with ceremonial cries and pelted with earth and red ground-fruits of the nonga plant (Amomum korarima) 'to take coldness from him'. He is carried to a stream and the relatives of the dead wash his hands and give him an infusion, made from various trees, to drink. Before he has been cleansed he may neither eat nor drink, for he is polluted like a woman whose husband has died. Finally, if there was no witchcraft-substance, a feast is prepared at which the cutter and a kinsman of the dead pull a gourd containing beer into halves and the kinsmen of the dead and the kinsmen of the cutter exchange gifts, a man from each party advancing in turn to the other party and throwing his gift on the ground before them.