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Author(s): A. T. Bryant

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South Africa.

Bryant.

The Zulu Cult of the Dead. *By the Rev. A. T. Bryant.*

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According to Zulu philosophy man is composed of two parts, the body (*umZimba*, pl. *imiZimba*) and the spirit or soul (*iDlozi*, pl. *amaDlozi*). Besides these, there are the *inTliziyo* (heart, feelings, mind), the *iKanda* or *inGqondo* (brain-power, intellect, understanding, memory, mind), as well as a hazily defined something called the *isiTunzi* (shadow, personality), which may have been originally one and the same thing as the *iDlozi* or spirit. But whether all these things are attributes of the body or of the soul, of the *umZimba*, or of the *iDlozi*; and whether at death they die with the former, or depart with the latter, does not seem clear to the Zulu, although the last hypothesis (that they accompany the departing spirit) would seem to be that which would most logically follow from other tenets of their belief.

The Zulu religion makes no definite statement on the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. The soul survives death, and is offered sacrifice practically continuously throughout an indefinite period of time; but how long it will continue to live, and whether or not it will endure for ever, is not defined. A man dies; but only in the flesh; his spirit (*iDlozi*, pl. *amaDlozi*) still endures. Whither, then, does it betake itself? Neither does it soar to the skies, nor does it go down into the grave and rot with the corpse. It enters neither into the forest tree nor into river pool, nor into the living body of other man or beast. But if it does not hark back unto the bosom of *Nkulunkulu*, its Maker, it certainly does betake itself where he, and every succeeding ancestor betook themselves, namely, to the nearest velt. There it becomes changed; and having shuffled out of one corruptible body, it now proceeds to put on another. In due course it reappears in visible form, in the guise of a snake. It does not enter into the body of any already existing snake, but simply materialises into one.

To kill one of these spirit-snakes was no doubt in former times an infringement of the native moral code. But how discriminate? Can they, then, be distinguished? They can; for the spirit-snakes form well-defined species, and all are harmless. The *iNyandezulu* (pl. *iziNyandezulu*), bright green of colour with black spottings on the upper body about the neck, is, if fully grown, always the spirit of a man of importance, a kraal-head or even a chief. When still young, being then not more than half an inch in thickness and a couple of feet long, it is a frequent and fearless visitor of the kraal fences, where it may often be seen moving leisurely about or basking in the sun. At that size it is regarded as the spirit of a man of insignificance, or even of a male child. The natives apparently suppose this small *iNyandezulu* to be a distinct species, and so usually call it, not by the former name, but *umHlwazi* (pl. *imiHlwazi*). The short, brown *uMabibini* (pl. *oMabibini*), also called *umZingandhlu*, very fond of taking up its abode in dark nooks within the hut, is the spirit of a female generally; though an old woman may take to herself the more imposing form of the large brown *umSenene* (pl. *imiSenene*), likewise occasionally called an *umHlwazi*. Some aged females, however, seem to object to becoming snakes. These prefer the guise of little lizards (*isiCashakazana* pl. *iziCashakazana*), which have the habit of climbing up to the roof inside the huts, then, losing their hold, fall upon anybody seated beneath. All these animals, being spirits of the dead, are, according to their rank, treated with due respect and never molested—at least, were not, until the Zulu came under white influence.

The only spirits that now really matter, that actually enter into the practical religion of the present-day Zulu, are the spirits of his father, his grandfather, and his other immediate ancestors. These he feels he knows, and they alone, he

assumes, have any present interest in him. From them he received his being. Them alone he fears, and from them alone all blessings and all curses flow. Practically there is only one demand they make upon him—namely, that he provide them with the regulation supply of meat, in other words, that he religiously discharge his duties, as prescribed by law (*i.e.*, tribal custom), in regard to the sacrifices to the dead. Any neglect will certainly meet with their strong disapproval, and will be followed by drastic reprisals. Their displeasure will always take the form of some misfortune befalling either him or his. Now they may rob him of a dear child or two; now they may deny his wives the blessing of offspring—for it is the prerogative of the ancestral spirits to mould the child in the womb; or, again, they may bring down on him or his family disease which the doctors will strive in vain to cure, till his obligations to his deceased forefathers are duly discharged.

But how shall he know whether the evil be the work of spirit or of human agency? The Zulu religion has furnished a device, which takes the form of an oracle, everywhere at hand, and at the present time accessible to all at the cost of one shilling. This oracle is established in the person of the *abaNgoma* (sing., *umNgoma*), popularly called witch-doctors, though more correctly spirit-diviners or necromancers. These are not the priests of the cult, for they do not officiate at the sacrifices, nor are they medical doctors or herbalists, a quite different and wholly civil profession, though both classes, in the Zulu language, are frequently called by the same name—namely, *iziNyanga* (sing., *iNyanga*), which simply means “skilled-ones,” “doctors.” The function of the diviners is simply to act as the mouthpiece of the spirits, as intermediaries between the living and the dead. They are, in a manner, mentally abnormal types of humanity, possessing certain occult powers (popularly called simply an *iDlozi*, or ancestral spirit), which have been, *volens volens*, thrust upon them by the spirits themselves; for, as the possession of these powers involves considerable illness and mental and physical discomfort, nobody desires of his own accord to become possessed of them. By these powers the diviners are enabled to get into touch with the spirits, who, feeling the necessity of having some channel of intercommunication between their world and ours, have chosen these individuals to be their agents or mediums.

AbaNgoma, among the Zulu, are of two kinds. The one, very rare, is said to be possessed of an *umLozi* or *umLozikazana*, that is, a speaking (or rather whistling) spirit. In this case the diviner remains perfectly silent, the spirit itself doing the speaking. Europeans are wont to explain this as mere ventriloquism. And such, indeed, it may be; though if it is, it is certainly strange that ventriloquism should remain an idea otherwise absolutely unknown to the ordinary Zulu. Again, ventriloquism would not suffice to explain the phenomenon of the diviner's being able to reveal facts otherwise inaccessible to our normal senses. However, although the writer has seen and heard the performance, he has not been able to discover whether it is really the work of ventriloquism or not. This particular method of divination is practised also by the Luba tribes in the Southern Congo State. Moreover, the diviner there is called by practically the same name (*viz.*, *muLoshi*) as the spirit is among the Zulu, for the *umLozi* is really the spirit, though its possessor is also commonly named in the same way. But whereas the Zulu spirit speaks from the roof of the hut and in a distinct whistle (also in Zulu *umLozi*; whence the appellation), rather than a voice, that of the Luba appears to be kept caged within a vessel of some kind and speaks therefrom in a piping voice as though that of a child.

The second variety of *umNgoma* is said to be possessed of an *iDlozi*, that is, simply “a spirit.” In this type the spirit is silent, the speaking being done by the diviner under the spirit's inspiration. This species, again, has been “consulted”

with more or less interesting results, by the present writer. Inasmuch as the *iDlozi* type of diviner embraces, perhaps, more than 95 per cent. of the total number of practitioners in this country, the writer proposes to confine himself mainly to a consideration of this species.

The bone-diviner and the diviner by the divining-rod, though both are now fairly common in Natal, are not indigenous to the Zulu tribes. The bone-man is probably an importation from the inland Suto tribes; the rod-diviner from the Tongas.

An *umNgoma* may be a man or a woman, a youth or a girl. As a matter of fact, the great majority (fully 90 per cent.) are married women. Further, any individual may become an *umNgoma*, though never of his own choice; only if called to the office by the spirits, who alone can bestow upon him the occult powers necessary for divination. The chosen individual becomes afflicted with some strange disorder, which proves beyond the knowledge and skill of the Native medicine-man to cure. To the European practitioner, of course, these disorders are generally easily recognisable as forms of nervous disease; though occasionally they turn out to be brain, even kidney or lung, complaints. It is this inability of the Native doctors to cure that suggests the probability that the illness owes its origin to the ancestral spirits. Moved by this suspicion, the patient's relatives forthwith betake themselves for a consultation to an *umNgoma* of repute. If the *umNgoma* finds that the suspicion is well founded, and that the patient is suffering, not from disease, but from spirit possession, the sufferer is at once removed out of the hands of the medical man and passed over, for initiation, to the care of any selected *umNgoma* of power. The initiation process (which may cover anything from a few months to a couple of years) consists mainly in the administration of emetics and other herbal remedies, as well as a course of instruction in the ceremonies and functions of the profession. Should the treatment restore the patient's health, such will at once prove that the diagnosis was correct; and so soon as he can prove himself, by practical demonstration, able to divine with tolerable success, the initiation process will be regarded as complete; whereupon he will leave the kraal of his instructor (where he has heretofore been residing) and return to his own home, there to set up as a fully diploma'd *umNgoma*, holding sittings to all comers at a shilling apiece.

This form of divination is met with among other Bantu tribes; though almost everywhere the Bantu name for such a diviner is not *umNgoma* or any cognate word, but *Nganga*, which is akin to the Zulu *iNyanga*, "skilled one," a term also applied by the Zulu to their *umNgoma*. The root *ngoma* is itself common enough in Bantuland, but almost everywhere means a "drum"; though sometimes (Kavirondo and Angola) a "dance"; with the Kikuyu "temporary madness"; and with the Nika about Mombasa, a "spirit." But right away at the extreme end of Bantuland, among the Duala in the Cameroon, we meet with a diviner almost identical with his Zulu *confrere* in character and method, and called, moreover, *Ngambi*, which is probably of the same derivation as the Zulu *umNgoma*.

The popular idea concerning this Native divination business is that it is wholly and knowingly an imposture. But such an absolute and unqualified condemnation is not quite in harmony with the facts. As far as the actors themselves are concerned the whole performance is absolutely *bona fide*; and, based as it is on their spiritistic beliefs, it is perfectly reasonable and natural. A close and unbiased study of the matter will suffice to convince any European investigator that, subjectively, the whole business is genuine (that is to say, is devoid of any conscious or intentional fraud); and objectively, that while some of its features are real and inexplicable phenomena, a very great deal is undoubtedly

untrue, and in its consequences extremely harmful and dangerous to the Native community.

The original aim of these divinations, as practised among the Zulus, was, by means of certain abnormal powers of intuition, supposedly possessed by the *abaNgoma*, to reveal knowledge inaccessible to normal man. But the aim of the modern diviner, if judged by his actual practice, while containing all this, goes a good way beyond it; for in these present days his main object seems to be, by means of a certain cunning device, to reveal to the consulting party *his own* knowledge or desires. To divine by intuition, then, and to divine by device, these two methods of procedure must be clearly grasped and kept apart, the one from the other.

To divine by intuition is no easy achievement, and must, at the most, be a very rare occurrence. Notwithstanding that every *umNgoma* claims to possess the ability, only a really powerful diviner (as the Natives themselves are well aware) can actually accomplish the feat. This type of divination is exemplified usually in cases of loss or theft of stock, and one constantly hears of instances (sometimes on apparently quite trustworthy evidence) where the missing stock has really been traced and recovered through the agency of one of these diviners, though, it must be added, it is equally true that the reverse is very often the case.

The second, and by far the commonest method of divination, is a very different affair, and may be easily accomplished by any intelligent person, even a European, though quite devoid of any abnormal powers. It is no longer a work of intuition, but one solely of skill, or, rather, of mental cuteness. This type of divination occurs generally in cases of sickness, which furnish the matter for fully 90 per cent. of all Native consultations. Cases of sickness, where the consultant is already perfectly familiar with all the details and seeks only elucidation or advice, are naturally very different from cases of stock losses, where he is himself quite in the dark and unable to offer any suggestions. Matters of this kind demand of the *umNgoma* no troublesome exercise of his powers of intuition, which are not always at hand or easily excitable. Here he simply uses "skill," availing himself of the previous knowledge of the facts already in the possession of the consulting party. The plan he employs is precisely that practised by children in their game of "Hot and Cold," but in the present case the enquirer becomes the directing party quite unconsciously and unintentionally, and not by word of mouth, but by a process of clapping the hands, which becomes more, or less, vigorous according as the truth (as *he* believes it to be) is more, or less, approached. Although they themselves do not know it, the African Natives are a highly emotional people, and their inner feelings exert a very strong and marked influence on their physical members, which influence will operate quite automatically and without any will or intention on the part of the thinker. In cases of sickness, moreover, it is the habit of the Native always to suspect some *umTakati*, or evilly-disposed neighbour, against whom his feelings will naturally be intensely aroused. In this state of emotional excitement he appears before the diviner. This latter now starts by a process of guessing or gently feeling his way. He makes a statement, and after each short statement the enquirer claps his hands. If what the diviner says is not in accordance with the facts as known, or believed to be known, to the enquirer, the latter shows it (though quite unintentionally) by a markedly indifferent clap, which the diviner immediately notes. He now alters his statement, and wherever the clapping is vigorous, he concludes that he has hit the nail on the head, and forthwith fixes that statement. Feeling his way in this manner, he follows the trail right to the end. After he has succeeded in nailing down all the facts of the illness, as revealed by the clapping of the consultant, he winds up by explaining that it is the work of some malicious neighbour, or may be of the

amaDlozi (spirits). From this it is clear that, in cases of this kind, the diviner is simply revealing to the enquirer his own previous knowledge or preconceptions, telling him what he already knew, or at any rate thought or wished for. In doing this the diviner is giving him just what he wanted, and here, as in all sound business, the main point is to satisfy the customer. But, however fraudulent the practice may appear to be to us, to the Natives, diviners, and public alike, it is perfectly honest. Skill of this kind is regarded by them, just as much as intuition itself, as being a real manifestation of the "remarkable" powers bestowed by the spirits upon the diviner.

It would be interesting, before closing this reference, to inquire whether the abnormal powers of intuition referred to in connection with the first-mentioned type of diviner (those possessed by an *umLozi*) are really possible in mankind; and secondly, whether there is any ground for believing that our Native diviners really possess them. Such an inquiry would also take us far beyond the limit of space allotted us. But we may briefly say, firstly, that the great majority of Native diviners being clearly persons of the neurotic type, all psychologists and medical men will concede that persons of this neurotic or hysterical temperament are capable, in their fits of exaltation, of manifesting quite extraordinary powers and of performing mental feats altogether beyond the ability of normal individuals. Secondly, assuming (as everyone will be prepared to do) that a certain amount of intuitive power is innate in every human being, we may readily conclude that, among the primitive races of mankind (including our Kafirs), these powers will probably exist in a strength and degree quite unknown to us, in whom, owing to the greater development of the reasoning faculties, they have become gradually atrophied and lost. Curious experiences that we have personally made in connection with the performances of these Native *abaNgoma*, and which would be inexplicable unless attributed to intuition or clairvoyance or some other such occult power; as well as other equally curious instances we have met with in many Natives, of a quite abnormal "sense of direction" (akin to that possessed by certain animals and birds), as also of a certain strange sense of "mutual sympathetic or telepathic feeling" existent between Natives (generally blood-related) distantly separated, and between Natives and the animals, all these things have sufficed to convince the present writer that our supposition is more than probable; that our Natives are really in natural possession, in a greater or less degree, of divers mental attributes which we lack wholly or in part.

The Zulu only sacrifices and prays to the spirits when he wants something. To merely praise, unless it be to thank or to implore (and, much more so, merely to adore), were to him utterly useless and meaningless performances. To placate and supplicate in his own interests; to seek the bestowal of some favour, or the removal of some ill-luck, that is his idea of worship. In cases of marriage, when the grace of offspring is besought by the father for his daughter; in cases of sickness in the family, attributed by the diviners to ancestral displeasure; in cases of death in the kraal of father or grandfather—young men cannot, as a rule, aspire to sacrificial honours, while females, even in life of small importance, as "spirits" are utterly disregarded—such are some of the Zulu sacrifices and prayers. But should it chance to be a matter of national rather than of mere family concern, as, for instance, in the case of a general drought or a war, then the Zulu king will assume the rôle of tribal high-priest and sacrifice to the Greatest-great-ones, the most powerful *oNkulunkulu* of the clan, who, naturally, will be his own direct ancestors.

The Zulu "temple" is the kraal or cattle-fold (*isiBaya*). In every well-regulated Zulu kraal, in the hut of the oldest woman or *isaLukazi* (generally the

mother of the kraal-head), a large ceremonial blanket or *isiPuku* of cow's-hide or goats'-skins is carefully preserved for use on sacrificial occasions.

With this wrapped round him, like a Roman toga, the sacrificing "priest" majestically stands at the head of the cattle-fold, and the selected beast having been duly slain with exactly a couple of lance-thrusts, he harangues the spirits of his ancestors while the ox is still bellowing. Having called them by all the praise-names (*iziBongo*) he can think of, "There," he shouts, "is your meat, ye of the "such-and-such clan" (naming, of course, his own); "take ye and eat, that thereby "this child of ours" (who is sick and whom you are taking from us) "may be "restored to health and to us"—or words of similar import, according as the occasion requires.

The business of skinning the beast is immediately proceeded with, and, when complete, the various joints are carried into the old woman's hut (*i.e.*, that of the mother of the kraal-head), or, if she be dead, into his own, where they are carefully placed in a heap upon the still wet hide, strewn with fresh branches. That is the altar; and the meat-joints are the sacrificial offering upon it. There the latter is left overnight "for the spirits" and untouched. On the morrow the joints are distributed and eaten by members of the family only, the prime quarters being claimed by the "priest" and other more important relatives, while that portion (generally the *iNanzi*, fourth stomach; the *amaNgima*, the "trotters," and such like), which nobody longs for, is allowed to remain, along with the ceremonial cloak, in the old woman's hut, where it is stowed away in some back corner for the sole entertainment of the spirits. Of course, it is duly found there next day, whole and untouched; and the explanation is that the spirits only lick it! A pot of beer is generally placed along side, and with the same result—they only sip it! Both these offerings of meat and beer are technically known as *umBeko* (pl. *imBeko*), *i.e.*, things-set-apart-for.

The *abaNgoma* fraternity is the only class among the Zulu that daily devote some time to prayer. Throughout the night and at early morn they may frequently be heard loudly praying to the spirits in their huts, or singing the hymns peculiar to their class. Wafted to one out of the stillness of the night, or at the peaceful hour of dawn while the rest of the world is still a-dozing, these songs have a sweetness all their own. The air is always in a plaintive, yet melodious monotone, and the burden of the prayer is for enlightenment in the séances of the approaching day.

Only the seniors concern themselves with these matters. The house-boys and nurse-girls we have around us—who constitute all of the Zulu nation most of us will ever come into contact with or know—take no part in all these pious practices of their race and know nothing of them. They are still mere children, and the ancestral spirits are fully mindful of them without either their service or their requests.

A. T. BRYANT.

Mathematics.

Bases of Numeration. By N. W. Thomas.

Thomas.

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I recognise the justice of what Mr. Migeod says (MAN, 1917, 4) about *naveviba*; but I am not convinced that *horo* may not mean twelve in some areas, nor yet that an importation of the duodecimal system from outside is not more probable than Mr. Migeod's psychological explanation. As I pointed out, I have heard of at least one more duodecimal system on the Bauchi plateau, without, however, obtaining any details.

If this is so, it seems at least as likely that both systems came from outside as that they were independently developed. Before the considerations urged by Mr. Migeod as to the existence of six as a base can have much weight, we