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viennese ethnomedicine newsletter



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INSTITUTE FOR THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE, MEDICAL UNIVERSITY OF VIENNA
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department of ethnomedicine

Frontispiece

Geomantic methods are widely used in Africa and parts of Asia. From Senegal through the Sahel to India people seek to reveal hidden issues and predict what will happen in the future. Typical for Africa is the way clients put the payment in front of the diviner on the floor, not to pay the diviner himself but to pay for the effectiveness of the oracle. After the session, however, the diviner will accept the money as a present. A frequent explanation why geomancy works is that humans are born from the earth, they walk on earth, they are nourished by the earth and they return to earth. (Photograph: Armin Prinz)

Viennese Ethnomedicine Newsletter

is published three times a year by the Department of Ethnomedicine,
Institute for the History of Medicine, University of Vienna, Austria.

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ISSN 1681-553X

Healing Rituals in Congolese Tradition

Hermann Hochegger

Introduction

The study of the entire ritual heritage amid Congolese peoples, was organised by the Institute of Anthropological Research (ceebe) at Bandundu, headed by myself from 1965 to 1995, in collaboration with 86 researchers, trained by the institute (see Hochegger 2004 a). Among the Congolese researchers, some had academic formation; most of them (teachers of primary schools, professors of high schools and colleges) were initiated in anthropological studies at the Institute, participating for years in intensive investigations on the cultural level of the Congolese peoples. All of them had the facility of verbal communication in their maternal language.

The Use of Healing Elements is Generally Combined with Religious Ideas, Prayers, Blessings, Exorcisms or Invocations

Regarding healing rituals, the Congolese deal with a widely developed knowledge of medicinal herbs and plants, leaves and fruits, of the curative role of animals and parts of them, of minerals, ashes, earth, of water and blood (human and animal), of colours, combined with symbolic times and places. The use of healing elements is usually combined with religious ideas, prayers, blessings, exorcisms or invocations. Very important is the conviction concerning the helping power of the deceased and ancestors and the beliefs in charms, power-symbols, genies (sprites, sirens, nymphs etc). The therapists know healing rituals by means of earth, ashes and minerals, using utensils, tools and instruments, or bring into play gestures of touching, fanning, whipping and singing. Most rituals go along with prayers, orders or explicative words.

Some healing rituals refer also to the belief in God, the creator of the curative plants, animals, minerals et cetera. Some Christian healers recall this idea, saying for instance:

“This sick person is one of God’s creatures, just as I, the healer, am. I am using this

plant (insect or mineral) to treat him. Since I am treating him in the name of God, he most certainly will be healed, for what I am using also comes from God himself, who gave us this healing power. In the name of God, he will be well.”

The use of charms, magic objects, is very common. There is an important diversity of different items, associated with the symbolism of witchcraft, forces, gestures and spells. To study this subject, the reader should consult each volume of the Encyclopaedia of Ritual Symbolics. (see Hochegger 2004 a)

Concerning sickness and healing, a considerable set of witch beliefs can be observed. Today in many parts of Africa accused witches fall victim to violence and prosecution even in modern townships. There is a strong traditional thinking regarding witches and witchcraft.

Effective Treatment Relies on a Successful Holistic Diagnosis of Community Life

The traditional therapist is persuaded that it is necessary to use for some treatments or therapies anti-witchcraft objects or beings: For instance, he is treating asthma by means of crayfish, because the crayfish represents the water genie (sprite) that drives witches away. The approaches to therapy are yet more difficult, when the disease is caused by the dead, by a genie, by the anger of a parent, by a social or religious conflict, by the offense of laws or taboos. Very often, reconciliation rituals are necessary to succeed in healing efforts.

In customary Congolese life, the reconciliation process is given a vital prominence. There are twelve methods of peacemaking, resolving personal and collective conflicts. “The conflict is part of our life, but it is important to resolve it by reconciliation!” say the experienced authorities of the Buma people. They are persuaded that each conflict is dangerous for the parties involved. So, in many cases of sickness, the healer must calm a sick

person down in view of her individual or social problems. It is very important that the community perspective be considered. An effective treatment relies on a successful holistic diagnostic procedure (Hochegger 2004 b).

The Performers of Congolese Healing Rituals

Among the Congolese people, the performers of healing rituals are not limited to some special experts, but they represent a large group of persons within local communities. For some definite illness, there are some professional therapists, but on behalf of diverse health troubles, the sick will get help from witch-hunters, diviners, ministers of genies, owners of special power-symbols and charms, from authorities (chiefs, heads of lineage), twins and specialists of the twin cult, blacksmiths, even from parents, grandparents, grandchildren and siblings. (Hochegger 2004 c)

The service providers are specialized in analysing crises and conflicts of individuals and communities. They know particularly when they must heal a sick person by means of medicinal plants or minerals, with traditional charms, by reconciliation rituals or by calming annoyed dead or genies and power-symbols.

Healing Rituals

Healing Rituals Using Water

With the numerous ablutions in use among Congolese peoples (see Hochegger 1984–1992), this ritual responds to a large array of needs: ritual liberation, reconciliation, pacification, pardon, healing and assimilation of forces. Ablution for a solemn promise, for an engagement, for being put under the tutelage of a supernatural power, and finally for the assimilation of the virtues of the water, of rivers, springs, lakes, ponds and wells.

Very common are ritual gestures of sprinkling water, of drinking, bathing, washing, plunging in a river haunted by a genie or rolling a sick person in rainwater or stagnant water. The Yansi therapist uses spring water to treat dental caries. The spring water is in relationship with the genie of the spring, which wards off sorcerers. So the healer says:

“Genie and water of this spring treat this boy’s tooth decay. If a sorcerer has bewitched him, give the cavity back to him.”

The role of the genies is to punish the sorcerer who bewitched the patient.

Among the Ntomba, a mother has the problem how to prevent a child from having his teeth grow in too close together. She executes the healing ritual while it is raining, before her baby has gone outside. She collects some rainwater and uses it to sprinkle the child’s body. She also gives it some of this water to drink and says:

“Rain, here is my baby. I am giving him to you. I don’t want him to be punished by your law when he goes outside on a rainy day and you are falling. Even if someone accidentally takes him outside in the rain, may his teeth remain intact.”

Sprinkling the child with rainwater and giving him rainwater to drink will introduce him to the power that manifests itself in rain, and that destroys little children’s teeth.

The Hungana wash someone’s eyes with water that has been put in a friction drum in order to treat conjunctivitis.

In order to get rid of a child’s whooping cough, the Dinga must drink water from the stream *Lukunkwe*. The ritual is performed in the morning, by a lineage chief, at a stream out in the forest, with the sick child’s parents in attendance. Sprites that live in the stream *Lukunkwe* have made the child sick, and it is they who are able to take the illness back.

If a mother has taken crayfish from a stream where such fishing is forbidden, her child may end up getting whooping cough. In such cases, the owner of the forbidden stream must be contacted. The child’s lineage chief will take the child to the owner of the stream and give the latter some money. The owner tosses this money into the river, pours some of the water into a bottle and gives it to the child’s parents. They are to give their child a drink of this water every morning and every evening. He says:

“If it is true that this sickness came from the crayfish your mother fished out of my

stream Lukunkwe, then may this water, which I am giving you to drink, bring you healing.”

An offering of money is made to the stream in order to purchase its power so that it will work effectively against the child’s sickness. Because the mother has stolen from a forbidden stream, her child must suffer. She must ask the sprite who lives there to use water from his stream to heal her child’s illness.

Immersing a Sick Man Three Times in the Water to Deliver him from the Power of a Waterfall Genie (Yansi)

It sometimes happens that when someone falls sick, the diviners reveal that the cause of his illness is that he visited a waterfall where a genie lives. In such cases, the sick person’s father will make arrangements with the person who is in charge of Lebwey’s rituals, paying him some money, palm wine, a rooster (or male goat), and a piece of red cloth. On a Friday, the day consecrated to this particular genie, the men go to the waterfall, where the ritual will be performed. The person performing the ritual snaps a young leaf between his fingers, making a sharp sound. Then he slaughters the rooster or goat and pours its blood on the ground, along with a little of the wine, and tosses a coin into the waterfall. Gripping the sick man firmly, he immerses him three times in the water. After each immersion, he rubs his body with a little stone and gives him some water from the waterfall to drink. As he does this he says:

“Sprite Lebwey, we know that this man is held captive by your power for having trespassed on your property. Today he has confessed his wrongdoing and is asking for forgiveness. Eat this rooster, and set him free. Accept the money and wine he is offering you as a fine. Grant him healing. May his health be like iron-rock solid.”

Blood from the rooster or goat is offered as a sacrifice. The sacrificial animal thus takes the sick man’s place. Wine is poured out to appease the sprite’s anger and to quench his thirst. A coin is tossed into the waterfall in order to pay for the man’s life. A red cloth is thrown into the water in order to pay homage to the sprite. The snapping of a young leaf serves to invite the

sprite to be present, after he has been awakened. The immersion given to the sick man sets him free from the sprite’s sway over his life. Rubbing the sick man with a pebble puts him in contact with the rock over which the water falls. This has the effect of strengthening him. Giving the sick man a drink of water from the waterfall breaks the bond that has held him under the sprite’s power.

The ritual specialist steps over the sick man in order to set him free. He also gives him some powder, which strengthens him, getting rid of any remaining power that the genie may have over him. In addition, the sick man receives a red strip of cloth. This will provide him with protection and ward off evil powers. After all this is done, the sick man is told to run all the way home. By doing so, he avoids the possibility that the sprite will recapture him and re-enter his body.

When among Dinga someone is suffering from an illness caused by witches, he must wash himself with and taking a drink of water from a hollow in a tree. A diviner will go out into the forest to look for some water that has collected in the hollow of a tree. Some of the same water is used to prepare a potion that he will give to his patient to drink. The expert says:

“We are uttering an incantation. Now take this medicine. May you recover!”

These words constitute a formula for healing. Water from a hollow in a tree contains the power of the sprites that live there. They are able to heal diseases. The veneration of these genies was an important feature of the tradition.

The Yansi Use Water from a Hollow in a Tree to Prevent an Abortion

A pregnant woman who has been out gathering food in a forest where the sprite Lobwey lives performs this ritual. She does this in the presence of her companions, near a hollow in a tree. The woman performing this ritual tosses a dry leaf, along with a mushroom or a fruit that she has gathered, into the hollow. She makes a funnel from some leaves and uses this to drink some of the water. As she does this she says:

“Sprite Lobwey, I have come out here into your forest and to your house to look for mushrooms. Please don’t punish me, since I am pregnant. I am returning your mushrooms to you. Please allow me to remain in good health. Don’t give me a difficult labor.”

Having said this, she drinks some water from the hollow. By drinking this water, she gets rid of any curse or illness that the sprite *Lobwey* might otherwise have inflicted on her or on the child in her womb. She tosses a dry leaf into the hollow in order to neutralize the sprite’s anger.

Amongst Sakata, in Order to be Healed of Measles the Patient is Immersed in the River Ngaleva.

A man called Mbey, who is the chief and owner of this river, performs the ritual. The ceremony takes place during the day, out in a forest, with the sick person’s parents in attendance. The sick person gives a rooster and some money to the Mbey, who then slaughters the rooster and offers its blood to the river genie. He tosses a coin into the river and asks the sick person to immerse himself. When the latter comes out of the river, he will be healed. The Mbey says:

“Sprite Ngaleva, eat this rooster and accept the money that our patient is offering you. As he immerses himself in your waters, may his illness be washed away downstream. In your name, may he be completely healed.”

By the words he speaks, the Mbey asks the river genie to help this man whom he has introduced to him. The rooster represents a meal offered to the genie. The patient gives a rooster and some money to the Mbey so that the latter will agree to perform this ritual for him. The Mbey has his patient immerse himself in the river so that his sickness will be washed away downstream.

To Heal a Sick Person by Sprinkling him with River Water that has been Blessed by a Pastor (Sakata)

Someone who believes in Jesus Christ, and who is suffering from an illness, calls on his pastor to come and bless him. The pastor puts a little river water in a glass, gives thanks to God and prays:

“God in heaven, you are Father to everyone in this world. Today, I give you this man, who is your servant. Heal him, so that he may continue to believe in your name. Bless the water I am using to sprinkle his body.”

Having said this he sprinkles the sick man with the water he has brought. By praying in God’s name, the pastor asks him to heal the sick man. River water that has been blessed symbolizes God’s power, which is able to heal the sick.

Giving an Ablution to a Child Who Has Become Sick After Bathing in the Lake for the First Time (Ntomba)

A child who was born under the control of a power-symbol, and who has bathed for the first time in the lake may become sick. The child’s mother, at noon, with other women present, will return to the lake and throw in a chicken egg. She takes some water from the lake and uses it to bath the sick child. While bathing the child, she says:

“Sprite, this child did not show you the honor you deserve. He has come forth from the power-symbol (she gives the name of the power-symbol in question). Ever since he bathed here, he has not been in good health. Even now he is still lying sick in bed. Here is a chicken for you to eat. Now please release my son, who has sinned against you.”

By tossing a chicken egg into the lake, the mother offers a meal to the sprite that lives there. She does this in order to appease the sprite’s anger. Washing the sick child with lake water will help it recover. This water symbolizes the sprite’s power.

The Yansi Roll in Rainwater a Person Who is Suffering from Scabies Which has been Caused by Lightning

An expert, called Ngakenzey, performs the healing ritual during a rainstorm that is accompanied by a lot of lightning, at a spot where rainwater is running in abundance. The specialist rubs gunpowder on the sick person’s body. He has him roll around in rainwater, and after several bolts of lightning have struck, he allows the sick person to put on his good clothes. He says:

“Lightning, I am your principal. This is why I can ask you to heal this man. He has paid everything he owes. May he be restored and experience good health.”

By rolling the sick man in rainwater, the specialist gives this case of scabies back to the rain. Scabies comes from rain. Bolts of lightning will chase scabies away from the patient’s body. Gunpowder is another ritual substance that helps drive scabies out of the sick person’s body.

Using Pond Water to Treat Someone who is Sick (Yansi)

The healer has the sick person get into the pond. He asks the patient to give him some body powder (the kind called “Pleasant Evening”). He throws the powder into the water and then gives his patient a ritual washing. The healer says:

“Sprites living in this pond, my patient is sick, and is offering you some body-powder. He wants you to heal him. Please do so.”

As they walk back to the village, neither of them is allowed to look back. Pond water represents the sprites who live there, and who have the power to get rid of the illness.

The Ntomba Submerge a Sick Person in the Pond so that the Sprites Can Get Rid of his Illness

This ritual performed by a healer, around four o’clock in the morning, in a pond to which our people has given the name *Liombo* (the pond where a village’s guardian sprites live). Members of the sick person’s family are present for the ritual. The healer walks around the pond, leaving a coin at each of its four corners. He strikes the water with his walking cane, and then, holding on to his patient, he dips him into the water. He says:

“Genies living in this pond, I have had enough of this man’s illness. I am asking you to help me heal him.”

While his patient is standing in the water, the healer says some words. Then, suddenly, he

brings him out of the water. Everyone returns to the village without looking back.

The healer leaves a coin at each of the pond’s corners in order to obtain permission to carry out the washing described above from the genies that live there. By striking the surface of the water with his walking stick, he awakens the genies living there, asking them to come near the sick man. The patient is immersed in the pond so that the sprites can get rid of his illness.

Drinking Water from the Genie Lobwey’s Pond in Order to be Delivered from Sickness (Yansi)

Someone who is often sick, and who believes that his illnesses are caused by the sprite *Lobwey*, will consult the specialist who is in charge of this genie’s rituals. He gives the specialist a blanket, a calabash of palm wine and a package of kola nuts. They go together out to the forest, to a pond belonging to the sprite. The specialist calls the genie by whistling, and pours some palm wine into the pond. He sprinkles in some salt and drops in a kola nut as well. Then he gives his patient a drink of pond water, and washes his whole body in the pond. He says:

“Genie Lobwey, this man standing before you is sick. You are the one who made him sick. Free him from the effects of your anger. He has already paid a high price.”

Water from *Lobwey*’s pond will appease the sprite’s anger and remove the man’s illness from his body. The blanket is a symbol for the stiff fine that should be paid to the sprite so that the patient can be forgiven. The palm wine, salt and kola nut are supplementary offerings.

Dipping an Infertile Woman Nine Times in the Pond in Order to get rid of Bad Luck (Dinga)

Several women perform this ritual together, each of which has given birth to twins. The infertile woman’s husband is present during the ceremony, along with several members of his family. The ceremony takes place out in the forest, in a pond where twins have been bathed. The mothers who have given birth to twins bring with them a calabash of palm wine, some

money and a rooster. They undress the infertile woman, and immerse her in the pond nine times. As they do so, they sing the nine songs that are sung for twins, and tap her lower abdomen with leaves. The mothers of twins reassure their infertile friend:

“The water in which we are immersing you, and the leaves with which we are hitting your abdomen, will help you conceive quickly and without any further difficulty. You will give birth to two, or even three children.”

Next, the rooster is slaughtered and its blood is poured over the woman’s body. The other women rub her with kaolin and give her a little calabash, which symbolizes pregnancy. They also give her a little pot in which to cook meals for herself and her husband. They speak to the sprite living in that pond:

“Sprite who protects twins, help this woman, who has not been able to have any children, by enabling her to bring one or more children into this world. May this be the outcome of the ritual we have just performed.”

The little calabash will be hidden under the woman’s clothing whenever she goes for a walk or visits her friends. To conclude the women share the wine and eat the rooster that was sacrificed for this ritual.

The infertile woman is dipped nine times in the pond in order to get rid of the bad luck that has been keeping her from getting pregnant. Nine is the number symbolizing completion or fullness and life. Twins are difficult to deal with, but under the right inducements, they can be persuaded to give women the luck needed in order to have children. The little pot is the symbolic property of chiefs. In eating food cooked in this pot, the woman will symbolically be sharing food with twins. The leaves used for hitting the infertile woman on her abdomen are from the plant called *Nkay Kiniang*. They symbolize fertility and the ability to give birth to many children. By pouring rooster blood over the woman’s body, the mothers performing this ritual chase evil powers away and renew in her the good luck she needs in order to give birth.

Ritual Treatments for Sick people by Means of Animals or Parts of Them

There are various cures of this traditional method described in the first volume of Congolese healing rituals (Hochegger 2004 c). Hereafter some typical illustrations:

Using Elements of a Charm and a Dead Scorpion to Treat an Abscess (Dinga)

This ritual is called: “Treating someone suffering from an abscess.” A healer performs it during the day, when it is hot. The ritual takes place at the sick person’s house (if he is unable to go anywhere) or at the therapist’s house. The healer gets out the charms he uses for such conditions and asks the sick person for a rooster, some money and some palm wine. He throws the coin into the packet containing his healing charm, pours in some wine, beheads the rooster, offers its blood and puts a dead scorpion on the abscess. He addresses the ancestors, asking for the patient’s healing. He says:

“Eh, you, the dead, sent a scorpion to sting this man. This scorpion has really hurt him, for he can no longer walk. I have compassion on him; he must not remain this way. That is why I would like to treat him. I am calling on you, because this man has given you some palm wine, a hen and some money; everything is there. Release him, that he may be healed; he will cause you no further problems. Someone can do wrong and he is forgiven. Have mercy on this man; may he be healed and regain his health. I have nothing more to say. I must treat his illness.”

After these words, he makes incisions around the abscess and rubs some ingredients from his charm into the cuts. He places the scorpion near the abscess. A little while later, the abscess will open all by itself.

Placing a dead scorpion on the abscess symbolizes asking the dead to treat him. The scorpion represents a dead person; like the dead, the scorpion likes being in houses. The hen and palm wine are food and drink for the dead and the charm (Informant Tata Idukau Nziebe, of Bandundu).

Giving a Piece of Elephant Skin to Eat and Using Porcupine Intestines to Free from Bloody Diarrhea (Aids) (Yansi)

The ritual is performed by a woman, in the presence of the ill person's family and the head of his lineage, in the forest, under a ritual tree. The therapist gives the ill person an ash obtained by charring porcupine intestines, anti-sorcerer bark, and a piece of elephant skin to eat. She brings some medicinal leaves called Kongo-bululu to a boil and has the ill person drink the tea. After having said certain words, she applies part of the ash to the ill person's abdomen, while forbidding them to eat animal entrails. She speaks to her charm:

"You, charm, heal this terrible diarrhea from which this person suffers. You, the ancestors who left me this power to heal, drive away the sorcerers who want to kill this person."

Rubbing the ash on the abdomen aims to drive away the diarrhea. The animal entrails and the anti-sorcerer bark can free the ill person from the bloody diarrhea (AIDS). The elephant skin represents the pachyderm's strength.

Healing an Alcoholic by Tying a Python Skin Around the Drunkard's Waste (Yansi)

A ritual specialist called Ngakemin ties a python skin around the drunkard's waste, rubs a red substance on his neck and on a glass. He fills the glass with wine and gives it to the drunkard to drink. While the man is drinking it, the specialist opens his mouth wide and cries:

"Charm Kemin, take from this man his drunkenness and give it to the python!"

After crying out in this manner, he takes back the python skin. From that moment on the man will no longer have a desire for alcohol. The python skin represents the big snake itself. The python takes the drunkard's thirst away. Thus the python is the principal actor behind the charm Kemin. The specialist opens his mouth wide while the other drinks in order to take the wine he is drinking from him. The specialist and the python together swallow the man's insatiable thirst.

To Wear the Bone of an Electric Fish so that the Disease of Arm Bones no Longer Manifests itself (Yansi)

An expert called Ngakeniuli performs the rite at the patient's home, in the evening or the morning. The patient gives the healer a coin, one or two kola nuts, a calabash of palm wine, and explains to him what he is suffering from. The expert takes an electric fish bone, fixes it well, and attaches it to a string of raffia. Before he ties this string around the arm, he applies black powder obtained from incinerating the skins, the excrement, and the fin of the electric fish. Having done this, he says:

"Disease, you were caused by the electric fish. Now I rub the latter on you. Leave the arm of this sick person. He has paid me in full, and you must leave him."

The bone of an electric fish represents this fish itself. The palm wine, the palm nuts and the money given to the healer constitute the payment for his services. The black powder is a substance that heals this disease.

Healing Asthma with Substances Prepared from a Dried Chameleon (Yansi)

A healer of this sickness, in the presence of the sick person alone, performs the rite. He ties a dried chameleon around the neck of his patient, takes a razor blade, makes some incisions on his ribs, rubs a little of the Muyeem charm substances in the incisions, and rubs the chameleon there as well, saying:

"You chameleon, whoever touches you must suffer from asthma. I use you in order to heal this sickness!"

According to beliefs, whatever causes asthma can also take that sickness away. (Informant: Tata Kiboko Albert, of Makubi)

Treating a Disease that Blocks Respiration Using Crayfish (Yansi)

A traditional healer performs this ritual in the morning, at his house. The parents of the patient also participate in the ritual. The therapist burns some crayfish, mixes the ashes with salt, puts the mixture into a glass of water

and makes the sick person drink it. As he does so, he says the following:

“According to the customs of our ancestors, in order to heal those suffering from a disease that blocks respiration, I must use these crayfish in order to heal you. In the name of my ancestors, may this illness be driven out.”

The crayfish represent the water sprite that drives witches away. By putting their ashes into water, they are able to enter into the body and do their job.

To Heal Asthma Using Ashes of a Cock's Feather (Yansi)

The healer treats the ashes of a cock's feather with the ingredients of the Nkwey power-symbol, and deposits the mixture in front of the icon. It is thought that this person's asthma comes from Nkwey. He says:

“Nkwey, you strike men with diverse diseases. Here is palm wine. Drink it so as to give me the power to heal this sick person.”

The therapist offers palm wine on the power-symbol, puts the prepared ashes into a glass of water, and has the patient drink it. The palm wine offered to the Nkwey power-symbol is used to entreat it to withdraw this disease that it inflicted. The Nkwey icon may withdraw asthma that it inflicted on someone.

Healing a Burn with the Droppings of a Male Goat (Yansi)

The therapist pounds droppings from a male (or female) goat and mixes the resulting powder with ritual material from the power-symbol Mikol. He pours palm wine over the power-symbol, places his hand on the patient's head, and applies the mixture to his wound. He says:

“Power-symbol Mikol, you give people energy to heal. Here is some palm wine for you to drink. By your power I am closing this man's wound.”

Goat droppings are a sign of the goat's presence. This animal is able to eat charcoal. It has a

relationship with fire. The goat is asked to heal the spot where this person was burned. The power-symbol Mikol guarantees healing.

To Sprinkle Cock's Blood on the Burn of a Chief's Son so as to Heal it (Sakata)

When the son of a chief, or a chief, burns himself, anyone who is in the area is obliged to catch a cock, cut off its head, and apply the blood to the burn while uttering certain words:

“The chief has burned himself; today the cock will suffer. You cock's blood, heal this burn as quickly as possible, so that I may eat this delicious flesh.”

Having done this, the healer will eat, alone, the flesh of the cock. It is to be noted that after this rite, the cock's owner will never look for the healer, but rather for the chief, by way of his bodyguard, who will pay him for it. To apply the cock's blood to the burn is to make it heal quickly. The cock's blood signifies a remedy, which will heal the chief's burn quickly.

Swallowing a Soldier Termite in Order to Get Rid of Cirrhosis (Yansi) (see Kutalek & Prinz 2004)

A therapist (known as *Ngambiim* or *Ngantoe*) performs the ritual in the evening, after a heavy rain, at the termite hill. The sick person, who is naked, gets on the termite hill. The healer puts a soldier termite in the bag [containing the ingredients] of his healing charm, and then has the patient swallow the termite. He administers the charm to him with some water and has him urinate on the termite hill. When he does, the specialist hits him in the abdomen with a whip and says:

“Cirrhosis, leave this man's abdomen!
Soldier termite, enter and cut out cirrhosis from his body.”

The patient swallows the soldier termite so it will pinch the cirrhosis and cut it out of his abdomen. He urinates on the termite hill to cause the cirrhosis to come out. The whip will expel the condition. The termite hill is the place where people get rid of this illness and where people who die of cirrhosis are buried.

The Yansi Transmit Asthma to a Scarab Beetle

This ritual is performed by the father, in the presence of the family. After catching a Hercules beetle, the father makes incisions on the asthmatic child's sides and rubs the scarab on the incisions, saying:

“Scarab, take back your Muyeem illness and leave. This child cannot endure this difficult sickness, go and remove this child's asthma.”

After these words, he lets the beetle go. This child is not allowed ever to eat scarabs; if he did, his illness would return. Making incisions allows the blood causing this illness to come out so the scarab will take it away. The father rubs the scarab on the child's incisions so it will take the asthma. Letting the scarab go symbolizes letting the illness go.

Healing Asthma Using an Incinerated Praying Mantis (Yansi)

The asthma healer, who owns an effective remedy against that sickness, performs the rite. The rite takes place in front of the house of the suffering person, either in the morning or the evening (that depends on the client). After having caught a praying mantis, the healer looks for the aquatic insects called benkaa, takes some thorns, puts them on a potsherd, and burns them to cinders. When the substances are fully burned, he takes them and puts them on a piece of cloth. The sick person eats this powder using a coin. The therapist says:

“You praying mantis, if it is possible, heals those who suffer from this sickness. Heal also this person because he suffers from asthma.”

The incinerated praying mantis is a remedy against asthma.

To Heal an Epileptic Using the Claws and Beak of the Falcon (Ntomba)

The healer uses the claws and beak of the falcon (Nkoli), which he incinerates. The ashes, which he obtains from their incineration, are mixed with certain ingredients. This product is

put into mokako sap, and he has the child drink this for a certain period. He finishes the rite by having the child wear a string of raffia around his waist. He says:

“You epilepsy, from this moment on when I am involved in treating the child, let him alone. May he quietly return to good health.”

To incinerate the claws and beak of the falcon serves to drive away the being that makes the child suffer. In having him drink these ashes, the epilepsy must leave. The string that he has the child wear serves to prevent any other bewitchment. The falcon claws and beak take away the spell of epilepsy that attacks the child.

To Heal a Woman's Sterility with the Ashes of Black Ants (Ntomba)

The rite is performed by a specialist in the matter, attended by a member of the woman's lineage, and her spouse. It takes place during the day, in the house. The healer uses the sap of bitter plants, treats the liquid with the ashes of black ants and other ingredients, not forgetting a little red earth. He has the woman drink this mixture for about nine days. He says:

“You woman, know well that from now on you will be fertile. You will have children like other women. This charm guarantees everything to you.”

To put the ashes of ants in the potion is to bring on the fertility that the client needs. The other ingredients serve as protection against sorcerers and other evil forces. The ashes of black ants symbolize fertility. The woman will have many children, like ants. The red earth is the protection of the woman against sorcerers.

Other rituals using parts of animals: Calming a baby's diarrhea with the help of a tortoise (Yansi); driving diarrhea away with toad's blood (Yansi); having a child who suffers from diarrhea drink chicken blood (Yansi); incinerating the intestines of a rooster to cure diarrhea (Yansi); to burn a cockroach so as to make an epidemic leave the house (Yansi); (see Hochegger 2004 c)

Healing Rituals using Plants

Plants and fruits are significant in Congolese ritual treatments. To point out some of them, let's have a look on the following items:

Healing the Misob Eye Disease Using a Peanut to Kill Eye Worms (Yansi)

A specialist performs this ritual early in the morning, before people brush their teeth. The therapist sets out a basin of water in which he puts some substances and washes the sick person's eyes. He puts a little water from the basin in a glass of water and adds a little of the woman's milk. Then he puts a peanut on a small piece of bamboo and dips it in this water. As he removes the eye worms, he says:

“You, illness eating away at my patient's eyes, leave them. Go away for good.”

The peanut is used to extract the eye worms.

Treating Eyes with Sap from Sorrel Leaves (Kuba)

A woman who has been initiated into this ritual domain performs this ritual. She does this in her own compound, with curious bystanders watching. The treatment is administered twice a day, in the morning and in the evening. The woman who offers this treatment prepares a liquid made from leaves of forest sorrel. These are placed in a fire, but are not completely burned. She gently rubs these partially burned leaves, and then places one or two drops of sap in the sick person's eyes. She says:

“May this illness be gone for good!”

The healer performs this cure with the help of an ancestor who has initiated her. Forest sorrel is a plant that is connected to genies that have the ability to cure diseases.

To Heal Violent Morning Headaches Using Ashes from Cotton Plant Leaves and a Grasshopper (Yansi)

A specialist who uses ashes from cotton plant leaves and a grasshopper does the rite. He makes incisions around the patient's head, and rubs the ashes there while saying:

“May the headaches of this child subside. From henceforth, may he be healed.”

The leaves of the cotton plant drive away violent headaches.

To Heal Dental Cavities with Avocado Tree Bark (Yansi)

A healer performs the rite in the morning, at his house. He has avocado tree bark ground and boiled. He places the drink next to the lineage power-symbols, then takes it away after a while, and says:

“In the name of our lineage power-symbol, I have this patient drink water boiled with avocado tree bark in order to heal this dental cavity.”

Then he has the patient drink the potion. To boil avocado tree bark signifies preparing a product that can heal dental cavities. To place the drink next to the lineage power-symbol gives it a special power. The avocado tree bark closes up quickly when it receives a gash. It can close the hole in a tooth.

To Drive out Dental Caries with Palm Tree Blossoms (Yansi)

A healer performs the rite in the morning, at the therapist's home. He takes palm tree blossoms, burns them, and puts the ashes into water, obtaining a yellow-coloured liquid that he pours into the mouth of his patient, who must keep his mouth closed for an hour. He says:

“Following the lead of my ancestors, to heal dental caries I put in your mouth a potion prepared from palm tree blossoms. Your disease will be healed.”

The palm tree blossoms thus prepared drive out the dental caries. The potion kept in the mouth acts on the diseased tooth.

To Care for Dental Caries Using a Green Banana (Yansi)

The therapist roasts a green banana until is burned up, grinds it to powder, which he mixes with vegetable salt and the bones of a field rat's

jaw. He wraps some of this mixture in a piece of cloth, and asks money from his client. The latter may give him other things. He places everything he has received on the ground, and, holding the powder in his hands, makes some invocations:

“You my charm which I have prepared for treating dental caries, here is this money and this cock which our client here, who suffers from dental caries, offers us. I ask you to drive this sickness far away from him.”

Then he says to the sick person to open his mouth wide. He puts the remedy (powder) on the infected teeth in such a way that there be bleeding. The blood is gathered and kept in a cup called Nziang. He repeats this treatment the following day. To give money to the specialist is to pay for his work. The cock is to eat. To rub the powder on the client's teeth is to get rid of the caries. To put the blood full of germs in the little pot serves to keep his contagious blood from falling just anywhere and contaminating others.

To Heal a Dental Cavity Using Mixed Ashes of Tobacco and Pepper (Sakata)

The patient gives something to the specialist who, in turn, takes the mixed ashes of tobacco and pepper, gives them to his client, who rubs them on his teeth. *He says:*

“In the name of my ancestors who bequeathed me this power, I rub you with these tobacco ashes that I have prepared with those of pepper, with the aim of healing your toothaches.”

He repeats the cure for a second time in the evening. The money given to the specialist constitutes his payment. One rubs ashes on the teeth in order to destroy those who gnaw on the tooth. Tobacco and pepper just burn whatever attacks the tooth.

To Exorcise Cirrhosis by Using a Green Calabash (Yansi)

A specialist who takes care of cirrhosis performs the rite. His pupils, the sick person and his relatives aid him. It is on a new anthill that the rite takes place, and at sunset. Small

children and pregnant women may not attend.

The specialist receives from the sick person a small green calabash, a cock, a calabash of palm wine, and two new calabashes. He opens the package containing the healing ingredients, takes out a big package containing the bark of the Ngil (or the Muwe) tree, the roots of the Kebwun bush, and the roots of the Munda-nday bush, along with the leaves of the Ngil and the Kebwun trees. He lights a fire next to the new anthill and burns the roots and leaves of the aforementioned trees. The healer deposits a raffia mat on the new anthill, and has the sick person lie down naked on it. If it is an adult, he has him wear a cloth. The sick person looks at the sky, while the specialist makes incisions on the stomach, rubs the ingredients from his healing package on the green calabash, and places it next to the fire.

As soon as the blood of the incisions on the stomach appears, the specialist has the patient drink the remedy that is in the warmed calabash. Then he rubs a quantity of ingredients on the patient's stomach. He takes a small green calabash well heated, and rubs it on the incised stomach, while holding it up to the sunset. Having done this, the sick person turns over on his stomach and the specialist taps him on the back with this little green calabash. Then, the sick person stands up and puts his clothes back on.

The healer divides the things that he has burned into two saucepans: one will be used for bathing and the other for keeping the remedy. If the sick person is healed, one proceeds again to another rite of liberation: The therapist says:

“You cirrhosis, leave the stomach of my patient and enter this young ant hill. My patient is not able to endure you, because there is no place in his stomach to keep you. The best place that you can seek is in this young anthill. Go and stay there forever. Don't come back.”

One uses a green calabash, because it is believed that the cirrhosis has its origin in a calabash. One uses it so that the cirrhosis goes back into the calabash. The anthill is the place

where the cirrhosis must install itself. To rub the little green calabash on the stomach is to extract the cirrhosis. The roots and the leaves of the trees cited serve as an anti-sorcerer remedy to take away the cirrhosis. To place oneself nude on the anthill means to become a cadaver. Passing by death, this man comes back to life.

Giving Someone an Infusion of Papaya Leaves to Cure a Cough (Yansi)

The therapist crushes papaya leaves and places them in some water to boil. He puts the infusion in a glass and gives it to his patient. He says:

“In the name of God, I am using these leaves to cure this sick person’s cough. I want him to recover.”

The infusion of papaya leaves cures the cough. The healing power comes from God, who created this tree.

To Heal a Cough with Kola Nut Ashes (Ntomba)

It is the mother who performs this rite when she notices that her child coughs a lot. She does it in the evening, before going to bed, in the presence of the child’s father and brothers. The mother takes a kola nut, chews it, and spits the chewings on the ashes of the hearth. The prepared ashes are rubbed all around the child’s neck. Part of the ashes is given him to eat. She says:

“This fire belongs to all of us, you guardian genies and I. May this child, attacked by a cough, be healed by these ashes.”

She finishes the rite by putting a knotted raffia string around the patient’s neck. To spit chewed kola nuts on the fire is to offer food to the guardian genies of the hearth, upon whom the child’s cure depends. The ashes eaten by this patient serve to make the force of the genies enter him. The mother performs this rite at night so as to prevent people of evil designs from interfering so and annulling the rite. One makes knots with a raffia string so as to stop the sorcerer who inflicted the cough on the child.

Treating Diabetes with False Manioc (Mukoso) Roots (Yansi)

The healer pounds the false manioc roots with red pepper and puts them in water to heat them. He goes in front of his charms and makes a short request. He says:

“You shades of my charms, in your name I take care of this patient so as to heal his diabetes.”

Then he has the patient drink the prepared water. The false manioc roots pounded with red pepper serve to cook the anti-sorcerer product. The false manioc roots are in relation with the dead. The shades are invoked so they will grant the power to drive the diabetes away.

Other rituals of healing using plants: To drive out dental caries with palm tree blossoms (Yansi); curing anemia with an infusion made of red sorrel (Yansi); healing a baby’s anaemia by means of flowers (Sakata); rubbing incisions with ashes from a fern in order to get rid of back pain (Yansi); curing heart trouble using sorrel leaves (Yansi); healing haemorrhoids with bark of the mango tree (Lulua); healing hot urination with the roots of a coffee bush (Yansi); hitting the hump on someone’s back with a fern (Sakata); purifying someone with scabies using paste made from papaya leaves and some oil (Yansi); treating scabies with red flowers (Lulua); curing sterility using a root from a guava tree (Kusu); using mango flowers to make a woman fertile (Yansi); curing stomach ache using squash leaves (Yansi); to heal stomach aches using banana peels (Ntomba); drinking a mixture of lemon juice, red pepper, salt and ash to drive off tonsillitis (Sakata) (see Hochegger 2004 e).

Healing by Fumigation

The Yansi Treat a Hernia with Smoke from Burning Ferns

A therapist, at home, performs this ritual over a pit used to expose patients to smoking plants. The expert arranges dry fern leaves that have been left for a time near his power-symbols. He digs a pit, places the fern leaves in the pit, and sets them on fire. He has his patient undress, and makes him sit over the smoking pit. He says:

“Power-symbol, you bring me good luck. It is thanks to you that I am able to do all this. I am asking you to grant me the ability to get rid of this sick man’s hernia. Because I am providing him treatment in your name, his hernia will surely disappear.”

Smoke from fern leaves is able to heal hernias. The fern leaves are left near the specialist’s power symbols for a time so that they will acquire special powers. By placing the sick man over the smoking pit, his body is exposed to the smoke, allowing it to penetrate his body.

Exposing Humpback to the Smoke to Get Rid of the Hump (Mbala)

The owner of the charm performs this ritual, morning or evening. The therapist goes to the humpback’s room and digs a hole, into which he puts some *Kibasa* leaves, a bunch of bananas and some firewood. He lights the fire and exposes the sick person, who is on a mat, to the smoke. The next morning, he throws the ashes from the fire on a mound of earth or on a termite hill. He says:

“Hump, hump, go and hide in this termite hill!”

Throwing the ashes from the fire on the mound of earth or on a termite hill transfers the hump there. The *Kibasa* leaves (from a calabash tree) will free the sick person from his hump.

A Humpback Steps Over a Fumigation Hole Nine Times (Yansi)

An expert, in the presence of the humpback’s parents or the headman of his lineage, performs this ritual. The sick person gives the healer a hen, some palm wine, a sum of money and some fabric. After pouring water into the hole, the healer says:

“You, hump charm, no longer is there any dispute between you and this sick person. He has given all we have asked for. Even if someone else sends you, you must enter that person’s body and his brothers’ as well! May the God of heaven and the ancestors punish him severely.”

Using a small stick, he scratches the hump and

throws the stick into the fumigation pit, which he fills with dirt and steps over nine times. Pouring water into the fumigation pit serves to neutralize the hump that was put there. Scratching the person’s back enables the healer to extract the hump. Throwing away the stick symbolizes disposing of the sickness. The healer steps over the pit nine times to trap the sickness for good.

Fumigating Swollen Legs (Yansi)

A healer, behind the house, performs this ritual morning or evening. The therapist gets a mat and digs a hole behind the house, into which he starts a fire. He sets the mat over the hole and puts the [swollen] legs on the mat. He makes incisions on the legs and says:

“I am making incisions on these swollen legs to cure you. In the name of the ancestors, you will be healed.”

The smoke will ward off the sickness. The incisions enable the smoke to enter the legs.

Freeing a Woman from Painful Menstruation Using Fumigation (Lulua)

A specialist performs this ritual, morning or evening, behind the woman’s house. The woman concerned gives the specialist a hen, a piece of cloth and a sum of money. Before the ritual, the woman is led to the river for a bath. Afterward, the specialist digs a hole behind her house, puts in a few eggshells, *Lueni* leaves and other ingredients. He lights a fire and has the naked woman spread her legs, exposing herself to the smoke. He says:

“I cast you out, all you who are clinging to this woman’s genitals. I invite you, our ancestors, to give power to this smoke and set my client free. Come without delay. Do not disappoint me.”

Smoke is known for its power to ward off those who cause harm. Taking a bath in the river will remove the sickness.

Removing Scabies by Fumigation (Dinga)

A specialist, in the presence of the sick person’s family, performs this ritual. He does it in the

evening, when the dead are at home to listen to us. The ritual takes place in the forest, under a *Wenge* tree (African oak). The expert lights a fire under the tree and puts in a few leaves. When the smoke rises, the sick person gets near the fire. The specialist sprinkles him with wine and rubs potions mixed with lime on his body. At the end [of the ritual], the sick person leaves his dirty clothing there and the specialist throws some hen feathers into the fire. He says:

“See, it’s me, the specialist who removes scabies. This man you have bewitched, release him yourselves. From now on, his body will be healthy. I’m done.”

The fumigation drives away the illness. The hen feathers thrown into the fire help burn away the scabies. Leaving the dirty clothes behind symbolizes leaving the sickness behind. The hen and wine are food and drink for the dead.

Fumigating the Eyes of Children who have Committed Incest (Hungana)

A ritual specialist conducts this ritual in the evening, with the parents of the incestuous children in attendance. The specialist places the children over a pit in which he has lit a pile of all kinds of leaves. The children are wearing rags or torn clothing. He tells them to leave their eyes open so that the smoke from the burning leaves will get into their eyes and take away any bad luck they have acquired by their incest. He gives each of them some salt and says:

“These children have committed incest. They are too young to understand anything at all. Nevertheless, today we must make amends for them so that each of them may once again have good luck and keep his ability to live in peace.”

Wearing rags or torn clothing symbolizes the state of bad luck in which these children have been found. Smoke passing over their eyes gets rid of the curse that they are under for having committed incest. Eating salt enables them to regain the good luck that they lost by committing incest.

Ritual Treatment Using Tools, Instruments

Driving Diabetes Away with an Arrow (Yansi)

A specialist in his forbidden room carries out the ritual in the morning or the evening, in the ill person’s presence. The therapist lights some straw that had been exposed to the sun, asks the patient to urinate on the fire and pronounces some words. While pouring some wine on the ground, he says:

“Shades of our ancestors drink this wine that I offer you. May the diabetes be driven away with your help. May this arrow drive away the illness.
May the diabetes be burned in this fire.”

He makes a mixture of rooster blood and explosive powder and applies that to the ill person’s genitals. He places an arrow there that chases away the illness. The therapist invokes his powers for the ritual’s success. The rooster blood and explosive powder are anti-sorcerer agents.

Using a Pestle to Remove Neck Pain (Yansi)

This ritual is performed by anyone who is willing to help, in the presence of the patient. The helper takes a pestle, rubs it on the sick person’s neck, and then strikes the pestle on the roof of a house. He does this nine times and repeats this treatment every day, until the person is completely cured. After touching the neck with the pestle, he rubs python fat and oil drained from an engine on the neck. The helper says:

“You, my ancestors and protective power-symbols, this man has suffered for a long time now. His neck hurts and he is not able to turn it easily. I am rubbing this pestle on his neck and touching the roof of this house with it that he may be freed from this illness. You, illness that is in his neck, I command you to fly away and leave him alone, so he can go back to work, like the others.”

Touching the neck with the pestle symbolizes crushing the illness and removing it. Hitting the pestle on the roof of the house transmits the illness to the house. The python fat or motor oil makes the neck smooth, so it can move easily.

*Using a Pestle to Drive Neck Pain away
(Lulua)*

A specialist, in the presence of the sick person, performs this ritual morning or evening, at the home of the specialist. The sick person wanting to be cured of neck pain consults a specialist and gives him some money. The specialist takes out a pestle, puts it on a mat, rubs some ashes on it and places the pestle near the fire. He says:

“You, my medicine left to me by my deceased father, I ask you to go to work on my client’s neck. He has just given us something. I want his illness to be removed, so he will glorify you. May this sickness leave his neck and go on the roof of the house.”

He rubs ashes on the patient’s neck, touches the neck with the pestle, and then strikes the roof of the house with it. He asks the sick person to return until he is totally healed.

The money given to the specialist pays for the treatment. Rubbing the ashes on the pestle serves to take away the illness. The pestle is placed near the fire, so the heat will animate the pestle and the ashes. Rubbing the pestle on the neck and striking the house a few times symbolizes that the illness must leave the sick person and go into the roof.

*Healing of Caries Using a Prepared Brush
(Yansi)*

A specialist, in the presence of his client and of the person who accompanies him, performs the rite. The therapist rubs a toothbrush (made from a vine) with the powder made by the Mbum insect, an insect, which bores even into big trees. Before giving the toothbrush to his patient, he has him chew the leaves of the Kekia plant, and then he brushes his teeth. To take the black out of his mouth, he uses the sap of the Mukiak stem. He says:

“If you are really the Mbum insect, go and kill the caries in these teeth.”

The powder of the Mbum insect is used to bore into the caries. The Kekia leaf neutralizes the caries’ force. The vine toothbrush helps to put the products in contact with the tooth.

Reducing the Size of Very Large Breasts with a Pestle (Lulua)

An expert, in the morning or evening, at his house, performs this ritual. A woman who wishes to reduce the size of her large breasts goes and consults with a ritual specialist. He asks her for some money and a bottle of beer. He then takes out a small pestle, puts it on a grass pile, lights a small fire and heats the pestle. He then rubs the pestle on the breasts of the woman and says the following words:

“I invite you, charms, to give to this pestle a special force. When it touches the breasts, it may reduce their size!”

The pestle is put on the grass because of the power that it possesses. It is heated in order to activate this power. It is rubbed on the breasts of the girl in order to reduce their size, because a pestle is a force capable of reducing the objects that it crushes.

To Rub Ashes of a Pestle on a Man so as to Heal his Sterility (Yansi)

A therapist, in the presence of the sterile person, performs the rite either morning or evening. The healer mixes ashes of a pestle with those of a guinea pig penis and the ingredients of the Kenkub power-symbol. He says:

“Kenkub power-symbol, you give men sexual potency. In your name I heal the sterility of this man.”

Then he pours palm wine on the power-symbol. With a razor blade he makes incisions on the lower abdomen of his client and rubs the prepared ashes there.

The ashes of a pestle mixed with those of a guinea pig and the ingredients of Kenkub help to heal sterility. The guinea pig is known for its fertility. The pestle symbolizes male sexual potency.

Giving Strength to a Man’s Penis by Tapping the Man’s Penis with a Pestle (Sakata)

An expert, at home, performs this ritual during the daytime in the presence of the man who is seeking this treatment. The expert takes a

pestle and rubs it with ritual substance taken from his power-symbol. This substance is made of seeds from the tree called *Kehuan-nzo*. Next, the therapist taps the man's penis lightly with the pestle. He digs a little hole in the ground and has his client lie down and inserts his penis in the hole. After this, he pulls on the man's penis three times and says:

"Penis, stand up like this pestle with which I have struck you. Stand up strong in the name of my power-symbol."

Rubbing the pestle with the ritual substance empowers it, transmitting to the pestle the strength that is found in seeds from the *Kehuan-nzo* tree. The healer taps the man's penis with this pestle in order to transfer this strength to his impotent member. He has him lie on the ground in order to demonstrate the results of the treatment. Pulling on the man's penis three times symbolizes his virility. By his words, the specialist calls power down so that it will enter the man's penis. The opening dug in the ground represents a woman's vagina.

Using a Zither to Drive out a Witch (Yansi)

A ritual specialist called Ngangwem performs this ritual, with the sick person being treated in attendance, along with the latter's parents, paternal uncle and several members of his lineage. The therapist has the patient lie down in front of him. Then he says a few words and rubs him with a zither. He says:

"Zither, you get rid of witches. Deliver this sick person from the hands of witches and of the dead. By virtue of the powder that I am rubbing on his body, every witch will be forced to leave him alone."

Finally, he rubs the sick person's body with a healing powder and blows some of the powder into the air.

Rubbing a sick person with an anti-witchcraft zither will cause his illness to disappear. The powder used in this ceremony has the ability to remove sickness (Informant: Tata Bakata Elwa, from Bandundu).

Healing a Person Who Stutters by Means of Water that is Poured into a Double-Bell (Sakata)

This ritual is performed by a ritual specialist, either in his house or in the house of his client, in the presence of the client's parents. The ceremony takes place in the morning or the evening. The therapist asks the parents of the patient for some money in order to purchase a double-bell. He takes the double-bell and pours ceremonial water taken from the casserole of his charm. He also adds to the water a piece of kola nut, some red marching ants and a coin that he has rubbed on the patient's neck. The patient must then drink the liquid solution in the bell. The specialist then says the following:

"You, ceremonial water from my charm casserole, mixed with other ingredients; I poured you into the double-bell and I ask you to make my client speak normally after having drunk the solution."

The ritual water, the kola nut, the red marching ants and the coin are put into the double-bell in order to receive the necessary strength to overcome stuttering. The coin is rubbed on the patient's neck in order to purchase the stuttering. The double-bell represents the charm casserole that preserves the power capable of overcoming the stuttering. The ceremonial water has the power to drive out stuttering. The red marching ants, with their pincers, also help to drive out the speech defect. The kola nut causes the stuttering to be vomited out because of its sharp taste.

To Tie a Bell on a Child Who Stutters (Yansi)

A ritual specialist, in the presence of the child's parents, performs this ritual. It takes place at the specialist's house, in the morning or evening. The expert puts some water and powder into a bell. He shakes the mixture, pronounces a ritual formula, and then makes the child drink the solution. Afterwards, he rings the bell next to the stuttering child's throat, and then ties it to the child's neck. As he performs these gestures, he says the following formula:

"You, bell, who is talking, heal this child who stutters. Let him talk like you do, and do not let his voice be closed."

To tie the bell around the child's neck is to drive away all harmful influences that prevent the child from speaking normally. To ring the bell next to the throat is to enable the voice of the child to be opened.

Healing Rituals by Means of Earth, Ashes, Charcoal and Minerals

The healers are convinced that white clay can activate the power of a charm to destroy the power of the sickness. Traditional healers use kaolin to expel tooth decay, they cure a cough with ashes from the hearth and stop diarrhea with charcoal. The therapist takes a few ashes, and rubs them on the arms, legs, neck, head, back and stomach of her husband, while saying:

“From these ashes thus applied, may the swelling disappear without any further ado, and may the sick recover his health.”

The white or red earth can help for the rapid healing of a sore and precipitate the escape of the pus. To cure asthma the healer takes earth from his client's footprints, mixes it with some stork droppings, adds a praying mantis, and strikes the client on the chest. Then he uses a stork feather to make the patient cough.

A woman healer mixes dirt taken from the former site of the grandmother's house with latex from a green papaya, rubs the mixture on her breasts. The dirt represents the grandmother herself. To heal a burn the specialist uses mud (earth and water) and rubs it on the burn. Earth is linked to genies and power-symbols: Healers can calm diarrhea with earth from the Mbeem power-symbol and cure diarrhea with genies' earth. The specialist mixes the earth from a hill with sap from the Ko bush and with some palm wine, pronounces a few words and has the ill person drink the mixture. Then he ties Moswi to the left forearm.

A man suffering from diarrhea puts pebbles in his pocket and says: “You, pebble, if you are really strong, make my excrements hard as you!” The pebble symbolizes the hope for consistency of the excrements.

The Yansi Give Salt to Someone Whom one has Wounded.

When someone has wounded another person, there is a ritual that can be performed to prevent the wound from getting worse and to help it heal more quickly. The person who caused the wound, in the compound of the one he wounded, performs it in the evening. Members of the extended family are in attendance.

The person who wounded the other takes a little cooking salt, gives it to the wounded person and says:

“I do not know if you were under someone's spell that you ended up being wounded by me, or if this was just an accident. If it was merely an accident, the wound will heal quickly. If it was the result of a spell, it will still heal, since I don't have any outstanding problems with anyone.”

Salt purifies the wounded person. It contributes to rapid healing and gets rid of any curse that a witch may have put on him.

To Heal his Son's Dental Caries with Vegetable Salt (Yansi)

The rite is performed by the father of the sick person, in the presence of other family members, in the family courtyard. To heal his son's dental caries, the father takes vegetable salt from a palm tree (Mungwa munkin), rubs it on his son's teeth, and addresses the power-symbols:

“Charms of my ancestors, it is I the father who speaks to you. For some time now my son has been suffering from toothaches. May this vegetable salt which I put in his mouth calm his toothaches. I also pray you to drive away all the sorcerers and evil beings which inflicted these caries on him. Our ancestors, if you hear me, I pray you to bring me satisfaction.”

Treating Someone Who Has Been Attacked by Scabies with Black Powder (Sakata)

This ritual is performed by a lineage chief who owns the power-symbol *Kenzar* (lightning). He does this at home, in the morning or in the evening, with several other lineage members in attendance. In order for this person to be

healed, he must give a coin to his lineage chief, and ask him to perform the ritual described here. The lineage chief intercedes with the lineage's power-symbol Lightning, and offers it the coin. He says:

“O my power-symbol Lightning, accept this coin, which our patient is giving you because he violated the taboo. He took a drink of rainwater. I ask you to heal him, once I have rubbed his body with this black powder.”

After this speech, he tosses the coin in his ritual pot and rubs the sick man with his black powder. Rubbing this black powder on the sick man's body takes away the scabies inflicted on him by the power-symbol *Kenzar*. The coin that the sick man gives to his chief pays for the use of the power-symbol Lightning (*Kenzar*). Rainwater is a symbol for lightning, which can do real harm.

Treating Diarrhea with Charcoal (Yansi)

The therapist crushes the charcoal, puts the powder in a glass of water and has the patient drink it. He says:

“In the name of God, Creator of Earth, I have this ill person drink this charcoal to heal his diarrhea.”

The charcoal is a medicine that cures diarrhea (Personal observation at Matamba).

Stopping Diarrhea with Charcoal (Pende)

The healer takes a piece of charcoal and traces the sign of the cross on the patient's navel. He says:

“Stop, diarrhea. Why do you want to gnaw at this person so terribly?”

This gesture will stop the diarrhea without taking any other medication. The charcoal is considered as the only material that has the power to stop stubborn diarrhea. The cross traced with the charcoal signifies the diarrhea's death.

To Heal an Abscess with Hot Ashes (Ntomba)

The healer takes the hot ashes, rubs them on the injured part of the patient, while touching

it several times, and adds kaolin there. He says:

“From these ashes thus applied, may the swelling disappear without any further ado, and may the patient recover his health.”

To rub the hot ashes on the abscess is to burn the evil being who caused the inflammation. They heal the sore afterwards.

To Rub Ashes of Snail Shell on a Patient in Order to Heal his Burns (Yansi)

The rite is performed in the evening by a healer. The specialist mixes ashes of a snail shell with the ingredients of the power-symbol *Nswo*, and deposits this mixture in front of the *Nswo*. He says:

“*Nswo*, you insure the health of the family. By your power, I heal the burns of this patient!”

Then he pours palm wine and rubs these ashes on the burns. The ashes of snail shell help to dry up the burns. To mix them with the ingredients of the *Nswo* serves to give them efficacy. To pour palm wine on the *Nswo* icon means to entreat it. To rub the ashes on the patient is to put him in contact with the forces of healing.

To Heal the Burns of a Forge (Yansi)

The rite is performed by the blacksmith, in the presence of the burned person and certain members of the lineage and the family of the victim, including his parents. The blacksmith uses ashes from the forge. After having cleaned the burn, he puts ashes there while saying:

“You genies of the forge and ancestors of the lineage, heal this burn which is on the body of this patient. Whether it be put on him by a sorcerer or by a dead person, may it be healed.”

He prohibits the patient from having sexual relations on the eve of the treatment. The ashes of the forge combat the burn. They contain the force of the guardian beings and the ancestors.

To Heal Burns with Ashes from the Hearth (Yansi)

A healer, in the presence of the burned child's parents, performs the rite. The therapist mixes ashes from the hearth with the ingredients of the Nswo power-symbol, to which he offers kola nuts prior to rubbing the potion on the patient. He says:

"Nswo power-symbol, here is a kola nut. Eat it. In your name I heal the burns of this child."

The ashes in the ingredients of the Nswo power-symbol have the energy to heal burns. The kola nut offered to the power-symbol invites it to bring its contribution to the care being administered.

Crushing a Few Stones to Powder to Cure Back Pain (Lulua)

A healer, in the presence of a few members of the sick person's lineage, performs this ritual morning or evening, in the forest. Someone suffering from back pain goes to see a healer, who asks him for a sum of money. The healer then gets a few stones from the river and crushes them to powder. He goes under the *Mpolepope* tree, takes a few roots, leaves them out in the sun and crushes the dried roots to powder. Both powders are mixed and part of the mixture will be eaten with palm oil. The rest will be rubbed into incisions made on the sick person's back. The healer says:

"Shade of my father who left me this medicine, here I am before you with my client. I invite you to come and introduce your power into the things I am making now. Do not disappoint me; my heart belongs to you. Do all to show your power."

The healer mixes both powders to obtain a remedy able to cure back pain. He invokes his father's shade. Drinking the solution and rubbing it into the patient's back eases the pain.

Curing a Fractured Leg With a Stone (Sakata)

When someone breaks a leg, ritual treatment is preferred, so the healing will be rapid. This ritual is performed by a specialist, in the presence of the parents or other members of the family of the person with the fractured leg. It takes place at the home of the specialist, morning and evening. The family of the person

with the fractured leg gives a coin to the specialist. The specialist puts the coin into the pot of the charm *Kebera*. He takes out a large rock, heats water in a pot, crushes or rubs the banana leaves and puts them in it. After all this, he wipes him with a piece of red cloth, which he always uses when he works. He takes his large rock and begins rubbing it on his client, then lightly strikes the broken leg. Next, he takes some powder from the power-symbol *Kebera* and a razor blade, and makes incisions on the leg. The expert says:

"My ancestors passed this work on to me and through this work I have healed many. You, stone, and you, *Kebera* charm used to cure fractures, here is the coin I am giving my client. I am using you to cure this fractured leg. Save him and heal them, so he will pay us when we're done."

Finally, he rubs this powder on the patient and requires him to remain at his [the specialist's] house during the treatment period. He may only return home after he is healed and after he has paid what was asked (a pot, a case of beer, some money, a rooster and a piece of cloth for women). Once this treatment is over and the payment made, the specialist releases his client, [first] by tying a strip of cloth on him, then cutting a plant in two.

The coin is given to the specialist, so he will invoke the power of his charm to act on the client's fracture. The specialist boils water in the pot where he put the banana leaves, in order to heat the blood blocked in the leg. When applied to incisions, the *Kebera* charm powder causes the blood in the leg to circulate. The specialist passes the stone over the broken leg and taps the leg lightly with it to harden the bone and mend the fracture. The patient stays at the specialist's house to make it easier to follow the treatment. The money, pot, rooster, beer and cloth are all fees paid to the specialist. The strip of red cloth symbolizes the healing. Cutting the plant in two (so that the object received remains with the healer and the patient receives a piece of the plant) means that the sick person is free.

Hardening a Broken Limb with a Stone (Yansi)

The woman healer requires the client to give

her some money, a rooster, a pot, a glass, a small basin and a calabash. Then, she breaks one of the rooster's or hen's legs (depending on whether the patient is a man or woman). Afterward, she boils some water in the pot, rubs this water mixed with wild leaves on the fracture, removes a stone from her charm pot and rubs it on the fracture also. She repeats this treatment until the fracture disappears completely. Rubbing the stone on the fracture hardens the fractured bone and causes it to mend more quickly. The money and wine are the healer's payment. The pot, glass, small basin and calabash are utensils that the man will use while he is following this treatment, since during this period, he is not allowed to eat, drink or bathe with other people. When the patient is presented to her, the therapist says:

“This charm was passed on to me by my ancestors to treat fractures. Now that you are under my care, you will be healed, even if this fracture is from God or sorcerers. This arm will return to normal and you will work with your friends. All my protective beings grant your strength to this remedy; make it effective, so it will quickly heal this fracture, which was caused by a sorcerer. The joint and bone will be joined together.”

The rooster symbolizes the person. The broken leg symbolizes the patient's broken arm or leg. The rooster's leg will heal at the same time as the patient's bone. The stone represents strength and endurance. The leaves in the pot serve as a remedy. The healer invokes the ancestors, from whom she inherited her profession.

To Heal a Fracture with Ashes from the Hearth (Yansi)

The healer takes ashes from the hearth and mixes them with other ingredients of the Mikol power-symbol. He pours palm wine for it, and the blood of a sacrificed cock. He says:

“Mikol power-symbol, here is palm wine and cock's blood. May the fracture which I care for be healed in your name.”

Finally, he rubs these ashes on the fractured place. The mixture of ashes and Mikol power-symbol means the power to heal the fracture.

Mikol heals bones. The palm wine and the cock's blood permit the therapist to acknowledge the power of the Mikol power-symbol.

Using Gunpowder to Cure Side Pain (Lulua)

First, the healer asks his patient for a sum of money. Then he takes out some gunpowder, puts it in a small saucepan, adds some oil and other ingredients, and places it on the fire. Next, he sets everything on a piece of wood and pounds it into powder. Taking a razor blade, he makes incisions over the patient's ribs and rubs in the medicine, saying:

“My charm, do what is necessary to cure my client. Here is the money he has just given us. Do not disappoint me. May this illness go far from him and may he find healing, so he'll give us many gifts.”

Finally, he gives him a package of substances to wear around his chest. The money pays the healer for making the charm. He heats up the saucepan of ingredients to obtain a special powder. The little package protects the sick person from being bewitched. The gunpowder will ward off sorcerers.

Drinking a Mixture of Salt and Ash, Lemon Juice and Red Pepper, to Drive off Tonsillitis (Sakata)

A healer performs this ritual, morning or evening. His father or mother brings in the sick person. The therapist makes a potion from the above ingredients (known as *ke-nkiker*) and has the sick person drink three mouthfuls, using a leaf from an orange tree. He says:

“You, X, if sorcerers did not bring on this sickness, you will be healed after drinking this mixture.”

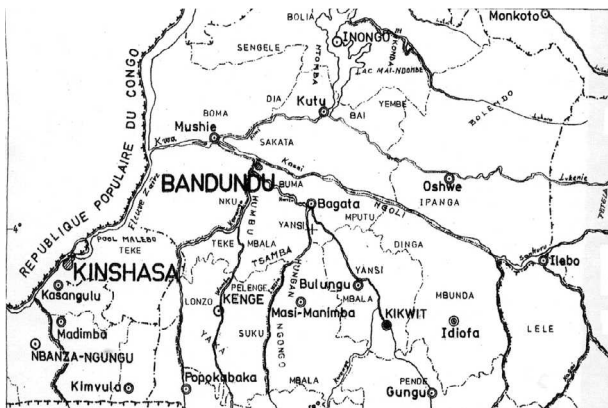
The red pepper and salt heal the sores caused by the tonsillitis (angina). The lemon juice destroys the tonsillitis (angina).

Conclusion

To illustrate healing rituals the Institute of Bandundu has published three volumes of drawings, accomplished by professor Binia Binalbe, a Congolese designer (Hochegger 1981,

1982, 1983). Some healing rituals are performed by special gestures, without employing any curative elements: touching, licking, fanning, caressing, whipping, dancing, crying, sucking, singing etc. For instance, to find healing by licking the diviner's ring (Yansi); to touch the ritual baskets of twins so as to be healed of an abscess (Sakata); stepping over the fire after defloration (Mbala); blowing air over one's breasts (Mbala); wiping away his anger before visiting her ill grandson (Ntomba); caressing the ground while asking for the healing of one's grandchild (Yansi); crying out with a loud voice in order to deliver someone from his or her insanity (Yansi).

To locate the geographic areas of the peoples concerned in this study, the reader can make a look on the map of the western part of R. C. Congo.



Drawing 2 (by Binia Binalbe)
Ritual of fumigation: To purify an adulterous girl.

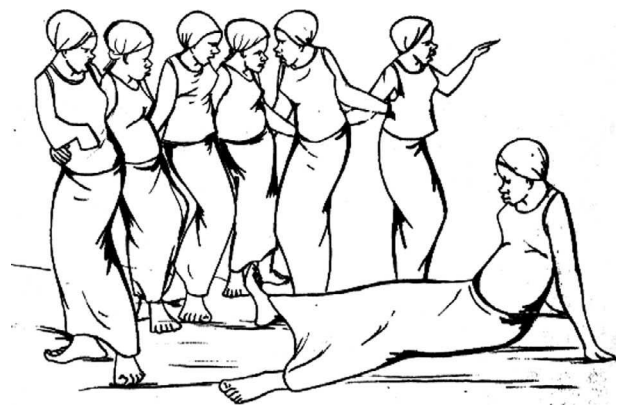


Drawing 3 (by Binia Binalbe)
Returning an eel to the sprite of a pond.

Illustrations



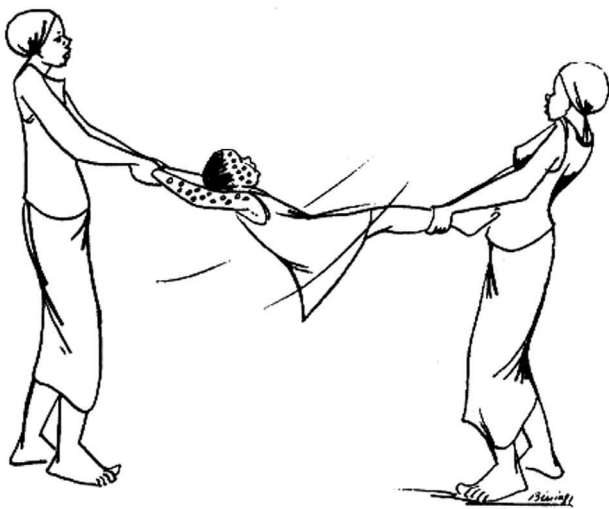
Drawing 1 (by Binia Binalbe)
Pass on fecundity to the river by parents of twins.



Drawing 4 (by Binia Binalbe)
Dancing ritual to assist a woman heavy with child.



Drawing 5 (by Binia Binalbe)
Ritual of sucking, to remove sterility.



Drawing 6 (by Binia Binalbe)
Ritual of swinging. Asking for productiveness.



Drawing 7 (by Binia Binalbe)
Plunging oneself in the river to get forces from a water sprite.

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Contributions to Visual Anthropology

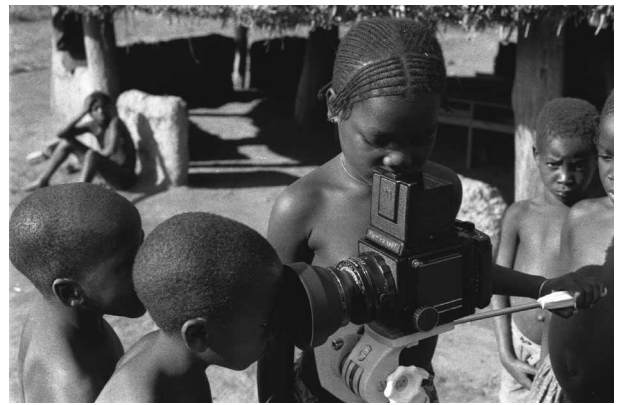
Collection Ethnomedicine:
Oracles and Divination Objects from Africa

Armin Prinz, Ruth Kutalek

In many ethnic groups in Africa divination plays an important role in decision-making and in the healing process. Often the diviner is the mediator between the world of the living and the world of ancestors. Whatever means he uses for his art – relatively simple instruments like the friction oracle to more elaborate systems such as the sand oracle (see frontispiece; Heidenreich 2003) or divination by throwing, in which the pattern formed among a group of objects is interpreted – (Fig. 6) – the main principle lies in the oracle's ability to foster communication between the diviner and his client and between the diviner and his ancestors. For an outsider an oracle session is usually not that clear an undertaking. The process of decision-making often involves the diviner's thorough observation of the client's reactions to his or her postulations. The client in the beginning does not hint much at the problem he is seeking to be solved. He expects the diviner to possess adequate clairvoyance



Fig. 6: Oracle Ivory Coast (25x8cm, objects 12-15cm) wood, wooden bowl with 15 wooden objects, eight of them look like stylized birds with long curved bills, 2 objects are phalli



Our logo for this series: Azande children inspecting the camera of a visual anthropologist.

Photograph: Manfred Kremser

abilities to find out his needs and expectations. He anticipates a life-counseling session. On the one hand the diviner holds undeniable authority which he draws from his knowledge of human nature and his ability to transcend between worlds. On the other hand, the client does not have to blindly accept the diviner's explanations. An oracle session is therefore characterized by an ongoing discussion process until the "result" is satisfactory for both sides (Kutalek 2003).

There is generally more than one system of divination used in an ethnic group and the systems typically form a hierarchy. Among the Azande the friction oracle *iwa* is the lowest in rank and the poison oracle *benge* the highest (Prinz 1978b, Evans-Pritchard 1937).

Friction Oracles

Friction oracles are widespread in Africa and consist of a magnitude of forms and materials. The basic principle, however, is similar everywhere. The oracle either consists of two parts which are rubbed against each other or it consists of one piece which is rubbed on a wooden board, the floor, or a woven mat. Often the diviner uses a liquid (plant sap, water, saliva) to enable easy movement. The client poses a question to the diviner and he, while rubbing the oracle to and fro, serves as a vessel and interpreter to his ancestral beings. Through the movement of the oracle they mediate their answers to the client via the diviner. The interpretation of the movement differs from region to region.

Iwa

The rubbing board *iwa* of the Azande has been described in detail by Evans-Pritchard (1937).

“If time and opportunity permitted, many Azande would wish to consult one or other of the oracles about every step in their lives. This is clearly impossible, but old men who know how to use the rubbing-board oracle usually carry one about with them so that if any doubt arises they can quiet it by immediate consultation.” (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 264).

The *iwa* consists of two parts: a lower female part with three legs and a flat surface, and an upper smaller part, the male, which is rubbed on top of the lower part (Fig. 1). During the oracle session, the instrument is fixed on the ground with the diviner’s right foot (Fig. 7). The *iwa* is carved from the *dama* tree – *Sarcocephalus esculentus* (Afzel.) which is considered a mystic plant. The same tree is used in the construction of the *tuka* – the ancestral shrine.

When the *iwa* is prepared the man is subject to taboos, such as abstaining from sexual relations for two days and food prohibition. The *iwa* is cut with an adze and the surface rubbed with a red-hot spear. Then the *iwa* has to be endowed with mystical power. First, medicine derived from roots mixed with oil is rubbed into incisions made on the small table of the oracle. After that the oracle, wrapped in bark cloth or the skin of a small animal, is buried in a hole dug in the centre of a path for two days



Fig. 7: John Akili fixes the rubbing board *iwa* with his right foot (photograph: Armin Prinz)

(Evans-Pritchard 1937: 362 ff.). Finally the oracle is tested by rubbing the wooden lid backwards and forwards, saying: “Rubbing-board, if you will speak the truth to people, stick.” (ibid. 364).

The rubbing oracle *iwa* is used by specialists, the *ba iwa*, but it is also employed by elder men who have been initiated. Evans-Pritchard mentions that the potency of the rubbing-board is derived from medicines the operator has “purchased” (ibid. 371f.). The diviner rubs the smaller part on the wooden three-legged object adding plant sap of the *dama* tree and regularly dripping some water on it to enable it to move (Fig. 8). When the smaller part moves smoothly the answer is usually negative, when it sticks the answer is positive.

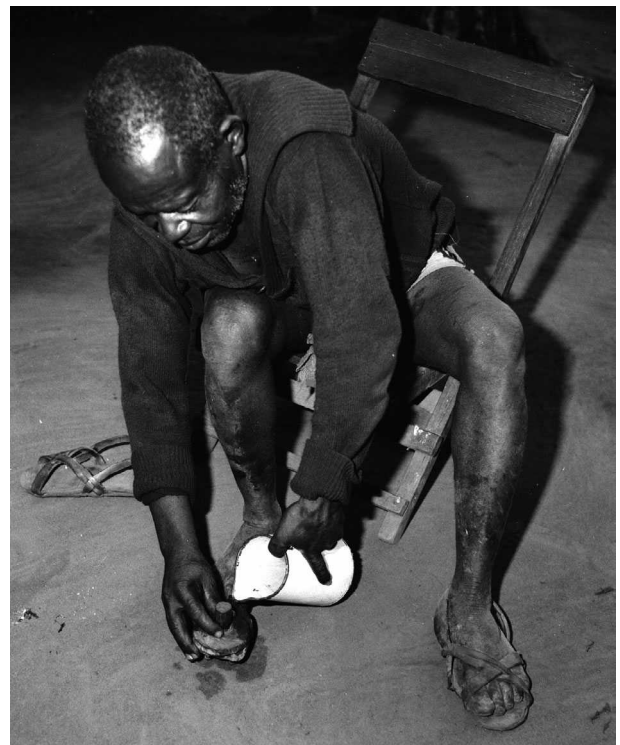


Fig. 8: John Akili drips some water over the *iwa*

Divination practices among the Azande are closely linked to accusations of witchcraft. An oracle is used to find out if witchcraft was the cause of disease or ill-luck and, if so, the name of the witch will be revealed. Divination is also employed to discover aspects of the future, for example whether one should undertake a journey or not. “The oracle tells a Zande what to do at every crisis of life. (...) They leave one homestead, although it may not be old, and the ground nearby may not be exhausted, because either someone has died in the homestead and

custom does not permit them to remain in it, or because the oracles have told them that one of its inmates will die from witchcraft or sorcery if it continues to be occupied.” (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 263).

The rubbing board *iwa* is easier to employ than the poison oracle *benge* or the termite oracle *dakpa*. It is cheap and can be used immediately and anywhere, especially in situations requiring immediate answers, such as in case of illness. It is also employed when issues are of minor importance. “It makes many errors, but they say that it has the advantage of being able to answer many questions” (ibid. 360 f.). The poison oracle, however, is always the final authority.

Itoom

The Kuba also use friction oracles which they call *itoom* (Burssens 1995) (Fig. 2). They are carved out of wood, usually have four legs and a flat back. The diviner *ngoom* rubs the back of the animal with a small wooden “stamp” until it begins to stick. In our case, the “stamp” is attached to the dog’s tail. Like the *iwa* of the Azande, it is a binary oracle which provides “yes” and “no” answers to clients questions. Burssens (ibid.) reports that this form of friction oracle was probably copied from the Kete before the 17th century. First and foremost this oracle was used to fight witches, to find the cause of misfortune and to expose adulterous partners.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo zoomorphic-rubbing oracles are also known among the Bushoong, the Lele, the Ngeende and the Ngongo. Among the Lele, according to Felix (1987), the carved oracle animal is the totemic animal of the clan of the diviner.

Oracles in the form of animals are especially known from the central parts of DRC. Zoomorphic oracles such as the crocodile, the dog or the bush pig relate to the animal’s outstanding sensory abilities. In DRC dogs especially are linked to divination because of their powers of detection. According to the Tabwa people of Southeastern DRC, dogs have “*malosi*, a mystically extended vision shared with few other animals and the shaman hopes to engage this power to perceive what others can

or dare not” (A.F. Roberts 2000: 90). Among the Yaka the dog is known for its tracking abilities. The skull of a hunting dog, its nose and eye sockets are thought to enhance the diviner’s sensory abilities. “The diviner behaves like a hunting dog sniffing the trails of sorcerers. His sensitive nose (*fimbu*) enables him to discover the source of any wrongdoing” (Devish 2000: 123). Diviners are also known for their ability to smell out witches.

Animals as means of divination such as spider divination among the Kaka Tikas in Cameroon (Peek 1991), the mouse oracle among the Guro of the Ivory Coast (Homberger 2000) or the termite oracle *dakpa* among the Azande (Prinz 1978a) may symbolically function as mediators during divination. In Chokwe divining-baskets small pieces of zoomorph carved wood can sometimes be found; the hunting dog (*muta*) represents the spirit of the hunter in the form of his hunting dog (Rodrigues de Areia 1985: 246 ff.).

Kakishi

A famous divination method is the *kashekesheke* rite of the Luba. During the divination session the diviner and his client sit opposite each other. The *kakishi* (Fig. 3) is held by the diviner and his/her client who circle the object over a mat. The instrument responds to the diviner’s questions through coded movements. Soft movements are interpreted as a positive answer, jerky movements as a negative answer. The carved female head sometimes depicts a famous deceased diviner (Eisenhofer and Guggeis 2002: 101). Our *kakishi* is 28cm high and is therefore a large example of its kind. It has a beautifully carved female head with a typical coiffure. Into the open lower body the fingers of diviner and client are inserted. Before the divining session the *kakishi* is prepared with the juices of certain plants to invoke the spirits. The sound which is created by moving the object on the mat may be the origin of its name (Robert & Roberts in Pemberton 2000).

The *kashekesheke* is an “ancient non-royal form of divination” (M.N. Roberts 2000: 69). Similar objects are also known among the Kalundwe, Kanyok and Shankadi, (Felix 1987), the Songye and the Tabwa (Verswijver et al.

Fig. 1: Rubbing board *iwa*, Azande, Democratic Republic Congo, (18x7x8), wood (*Sarcocephalus sambucinus* (Winterbott.) (K.Sch.)



Fig. 2: Rubbing board in the form of a dog *itoom*, *itombwa* Kuba? Democratic Republic Congo, (20x11x8), wood, bone



Fig. 3: Rubbing oracle *kakishi*, Luba? Democratic Republic Congo, (28x14x8), wood



Fig. 4: Suwer painting, artist unknown, (Picture painted on the back of the glass) Senegal, (48x33cm), glass, paint



Fig. 5: Painting of an oracle session by John Kilaka, Tanzania, 1993 (65x57), cloth, paint

1995: 181, 228, 348, 369 f.). *Kashekesheke* is said to be older than spirit possession, from before the time of Luba kingship. The Luba diviner can be either male or female, but the *kakisi* is always female.

Paintings

Our collection also possesses depictions of divination sessions, such as scenery of a cowry oracle session in metal from Senegal (Fig. 9) and a *suwer* (from French *sous verre* – under glass) painting from Senegal (Fig. 4).



Fig. 9: Scenery of a cowry oracle session in metal from Senegal

The *suwer* painting shows an oracle session with cowry shells. In the centre of the painting a male diviner is depicted. He is wearing the typical conic head of the region. Protruding from the upper part of his hat are two horns, probably denoting him as a diviner. He is adorned with a necklace of cowry shells which has a bird's head as a pendant. Around his arms and forehead he wears several amulets with cowry shells. He is sitting on the floor on something which at the first sight looks like a hide, and only with a closer look does the real nature of the object reveal itself: three fingers and an eye are to be seen on the lower right side. This transcendent being might be a spirit which supports the healer while divining. In front of him lies a flat basket with cowrie shells. Near his left foot and behind his left arm bowls with cowry shells can also be seen. With his right hand he operates the oracle. Opposite the diviner – the flat divining basket in between – a woman, his client, is sitting with a child sleeping on her lap. She watches the diviner attentively. In the background a *pangool* (animistic shrine),

obviously depicted for the exotic taste of tourists, can also be seen.

The casting of cowrie shells is a widely-spread practice in West Africa and by Caribbean and Brazilian people of West Africa. It belongs to the type of divination that rely on “sixteen signs” (such as Ifa among the Yoruba and Fa among the Fon) and probably has its origins in Islamic sand writing (Pemberton 2000).

Another painting is John Kilaka's depiction of an oracle session in the Sumbawanga region, South Tanzania (Fig. 5). It shows divination with water which enables the diviner to see the cause of a client's affliction in the water. The painting is titled “If you have promised something it is good to keep it”. John Kilaka explains its background:

“The husband and the wife have no children so they go to the traditional healer to seek for help. This traditional healer was also a witch. They went there and got the medicine. After some time the woman became pregnant. When they got the medicine they did not pay. They said when the woman becomes pregnant they will pay. When that woman became pregnant it was through the help of the healer. So he went to claim the money. However, they both refused to pay. The man said: “My wife became pregnant in the normal way”. The traditional healer became sad and went home. When he arrived home he said: “Now they will see.” He made some medicine and during the night went back. He turned into a witch, a bad witch. That witch put some medicine and did all the other things (he bewitched them) and the wife became very sick. After being sick for a few days they decided to go to another traditional healer. They went to this one (scene on the painting). When they arrived there the healer put water in the pot and added some medicine. The face of that other traditional healer was seen in the water. Before the other healer started the medicine, the witch healer noted that ‘Now they are with that other *mganga* (healer).’ He went by his witchcraft (witch in the upper part of the painting). He went to fight with him. The healer noted that there is something, that another witch has come to his house. The healer asked them: ‘Do you remember this face in the water? This is the one who has done bad to you.’ They said: ‘Yes.’ He asked: ‘What have you done?’

They explained: ‘We have not paid him.’ The healer said: ‘No, I am not going to help you. Go back home and go to that healer and pay the money.’ They went home and paid the money to him. So, the woman became well. It is good to remember the promise!”

John Kilaka furthermore explains: “They put the water in a white pot, and they put medicine into it. That is the way to check the things. It is like television. This type of investigation, they really believe in it in Sumbawanga. Because you see the real face of the one. Then you can see the bad things you have done to the other one.”

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Barber-Surgeons, Doctors and the Tyrolean Peasant Doctors

Walter Prevedel

During the 19th century medical development and appropriate care of people progressed especially in the cities and during the industrial revolution people found not only fine medical treatment, but also good social care in the quickly developing new hospitals.

In the rural areas this infrastructural development did not take place and the population there could not profit from professional doctors or from hospital care. The reason for this lack of infrastructure was simply because there were no financial means in the counties and communities. If necessary, people in the small settlements, villages and secluded farms as well as the mountain farmers used their own recipes, mostly handed down from generation to generation, which they kept secret. These recipes were not only used to heal people but frequently sick animals also. If the effectiveness of these recipes did not work, they could get help from practising barber-surgeons, dentists or other healers. Although these medical helpers were paid in kind or in cash, they were more accessible to the simple folk than the medical doctors in the cities. An account of Tyrolean peasant doctors from the beginning of the 19th century until the 20th century will demonstrate this.

The Practice of Folk Medicine in Rural Tyrol in the 18th and 19th Centuries

In the 18th century only a few doctors graduated annually at the University of Innsbruck. Because of their high reputation, they were addressed as “Excellence” up to a court decree in 1755. According to Merhart (1988) these “medici” were essentially treated as equals to the aristocracy. With the exception of the University of Vienna the freedom of the medical establishment however, was limited and medical doctors could only practice in the area of the university they graduated from. Until 1872 doctors were only trained in certain specialties, such as surgery, dermatology and dentistry, etc. Only from this time on was there a restructuring in universities of the training of

physicians to become doctors of holistic medicine.

In rural Tyrol the practice of medicine lay firmly in the hands of the barber-surgeons who worked as surgeons and wound surgeons. The intestinal hernia surgeon “Lithotomus” and the cataract specialist called “Starstecher” collaborated with them for eye operations. The designation “Leibarzt” was given to a barber-surgeon, who is specialized in internal medical treatment. Since the middle of the 18th century legislative authorities took care to regulate and improve the education of the barber-surgeons, to shed them of their hand-working image and to achieve a clear distinction to doctors. The raising of standards of the examination material and requirements at universities resulted in an appropriate failure ratio of candidates, and led to certified and non-certified barber-surgeons.

The requirements for the professional development of the barber-surgeons began as early as the end of the 13th century when the separation of medicine and surgery took place. Medical doctors were unwilling to deal with sick people manually and so the sick person would be referred to a barber, later barber-surgeon, surgeon or wound surgeon. The areas of responsibility of the barber-surgeons were mostly activities like bleeding – which was frequently carried out - ophthalmology and obstetrics, surgical tasks, the extraction of teeth and the treatment of wounds. These skilful barber-surgeons were not only in demand by the people, but also employed at the courts of the Tyrolean rulers. Already from 1288 to 1350 several barber-surgeons were employed as “medici” at the courts of the Tyrolean sovereigns.

In Tyrol the practical education of barber-surgeons was equivalent to that of a pharmacist, the apprenticeship lasted three years with a master, followed by an equally long practical training abroad. Upon return the choice was

either to work independently or to take a professional examination. Unqualified barber-surgeons were permitted by law to shear beards and to fleece. The work of qualified barber-surgeons approached that of a surgeon. They were able to consult a medical doctor in difficult cases – provided one lived nearby – but was not permitted to order effective therapy for internal illness without his recommendation.

Up to the time of the 30-Years-War the majority of barber-surgeons owned a small house with a bathroom for healing treatment equipped with a steam bath. From 1772 onwards a new law required that every barber-surgeon in Tyrol had to produce proof of a University examination and all non-university medical country doctors acquired the title surgeon or wound-surgeon. Nevertheless, amongst the people the term “barber-surgeon” was used up to the beginning of the 19th century.

Besides the barbers, barber-surgeons, surgeons and wound surgeons was the military surgeon. This job title was given to surgeons who serve with the Armed Forces or in the case of war. Barber-surgeons and wound surgeons also treated sick animals, provided peasant doctors did not dispute their work. At the end of 18th century the separation of surgeons of higher medicine with a free choice of surgery and second-class surgeons who practised their profession independently, irrespective of whether they were in the city or in the country, in the salesroom or adjoining room of a pharmacy, took place. In the 18th century clergyman were prohibited to practice medical activities alongside their church duties. Between 1748 and 1768 the gradual ban on the pursuit of a pharmaceutical career also took place. At that time clergymen were only allowed to collect herbs for healing purposes. From 1770 onwards pharmacists were also prohibited from practising a medical activity although until that time medical help in various cases was carried out.

Since the middle of the 16th century there were some itinerant intestinal hernia surgeons and concretion healers, oculists and wound surgeons as well as dentists who offered their services in Tyrol. Among these was Thomas Pfeiffelmann, who around 1583 attained fame particularly as

an intestinal hernia surgeon. In the second half of the 17th century the oculist and wound surgeon Georg Rieck was highly esteemed specially because of his daring eye operations. In the winter of 1721/22 the country doctor, oculist, intestinal hernia surgeon and concretion healer Johann Ulrich Lonius, also personal physician of the Tyrolean sovereign, lived there for eleven weeks selling his medicaments and medicine in the law buildings of Landeck where he also treated four patients successfully with eye complaints. Because of the lack of qualified young people at that time, the relevant Tyrolean laws required the alternate presence of a medically-trained person in various places. Until the 19th century a few itinerant surgeons still travelled around in Tyrol and offered their services. One of the last surgeons pulled out teeth and also sold hernia bandages and enemas syringes. To stimulate their business oculists, concretion healers and dentists at that time preferred to dress up in extremely shrill, multicoloured clothes and to adorn themselves with unusual titles of nobility.

Through the improvement and expansion of general education in schools in Tyrol more and more people learned to read and write. When the book “Heilsame Hausapotheke” by Jakob Christof Wagner appeared in 1714 in Innsbruck, a steady increasing number of Tyroleans acquired it. From now on everyone tried to independently cure themselves with various degrees of success with the recipes and advice in the book. Unaffected to this development, the relationship between ordinary people and barber-surgeon remained good. Remarkable is the fact that there was only one complaint documented in the Landecker court records against a barber-surgeon between 1580 till 1799. The court complaint referred to the Landecker barber-surgeon Konrad Harpf, who was accused of using barbarian methods while treating a fracture of the thigh.

On no account could hospitals at this time be compared to present-day hospitals. They were primarily care houses for the poor, local inhabitants who were unfit to work, and healthy as well as sick travellers. In general acute reform was needed in the hospitals and only under the Empress Maria Theresia were conditions improved to the benefit of the patients (Merhart 1988: 91ff.).

Medical Care of the Tyrolean Population in the 18th and 19th Centuries

The number of trained doctors and pharmacists was low and if they were available, they were to be found predominantly in the cities. An insuperable problem for the vast majority of the rural population was their financial circumstances. Hardly anybody could afford the strenuous expensive journey to the medicus, let alone pay the doctor's bill and accompanying treatment.

The population was not only forced to cure itself independently in simpler cases of illness because of their dire financial circumstances. For treatment, herbs and sometimes excrement of animals and even living animals were applied. These were roasted, dried and ground to powder. Only in difficult, predominantly surgical cases, was the barber-surgeon consulted and in Tyrol when the era of peasant doctors dawned, they were also consulted – for many people it was cheaper and less troublesome. The barber-surgeons in former times were versatile and flexible.

In Tyrol wound surgeons in the country were frequently employed in all medical emergencies before the standardization of the profession of doctors was introduced in 1872. Among the professionally-trained doctors there was a considerable number of clergymen who also had a university degree in medicine. After graduation they either became monks or worked at court as internists.

Humoral pathology at this time was the basic foundation of medical knowledge. The Greek physician Polybos (ca. 350 B.C.) and son-in-law of Hippokrates of Kos (ca. 460 B.C. – ca. 375 B.C.), wrote the treatise *De natura hominis*. In this book, the relationship of the humours – blood, mucus and black and yellow bile – represented the elements fire, water, air and earth, as well as their respective qualities warm, cold, damp and dry in a balance (*Eukrasie*) which determined human health. In this concept diseases are caused by the disturbance of this balance (*Dyskrasie*). In the opinion of Claudius Galenus also called Galen (ca. 129 A.C. – ca. 211 A.C.) each of the humours is produced in an individual organ and according to the teachings of the four elements is in relationship to

one of them. Different characters of people can be explained as well as changes of health because the four seasons and the different ages have an influence on the production of these humours. Galen summarizes the entire medical knowledge of his time and follows the philosophy of the followers of Hippokrates.

Among the ancient possessions of Tyrol are the recipes which formed the basis for the production of plasters, ointments, tinctures and bandages. The medieval universal healing remedy *Theriak* as well as medicine with sugar in the form of pastes, the *Latwergen*, derived from this. At that time written recipes could not be read by the majority of the population. Hence, their documentation fell into oblivion and the oral tradition of passing down information lessened with the passage of time. The result is that much valuable knowledge from the past disappeared.

The most important factor for nature healers is the mutual confidence which should exist between healer and patient and to the prescribed cure. Where confidence is lacking and doubt exists, the healer cannot be successful. If the confidence of the patient is unshakable, the healer achieves his greatest success particularly with psychosomatic illnesses (Merhart 1988: 8ff.).

“Superstition”, Magic and Wizardry

The involvement of ethnic studies in so-called “superstition” and magic is different to that in theology and pastoral care. The term “superstition” is not a neutral definition according to Bachter (2001) and therefore has negative connotations. “Superstition” means wrong or misguided belief. The use of the term “superstition” implies the opposite of right, correct and true belief. This definition of “superstition” is used particularly by representatives of religion and science. On the one hand “superstition” is separated from the only set belief of theological doctrines, and on the other hand, modern science bases their claim on proof, rationality and freedom of contradiction. Everything that does not adhere to the criteria of reason and natural laws is classified as “superstition”. Thus “superstition”, as the *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* describes, becomes a belief in the effect and observation of forces,

which are not explicable by natural law. The use of the term “superstition” calls for a definition which states what the correct belief and correct attitude is.

Magic in the modern sense is the belief in the existence of transcendental, hidden, occult forces. For a person who believes in magic, there is no question of getting in touch with these forces. They know that they can communicate and profit from them by rituals and language. Magic has a pragmatic function. Its task is the fulfilment of human wishes, the acquiring of goals and the execution of the will of the magician or the person involved. Magic is connected to the solving of everyday problems. The user of magic believes that through his rituals he receives power from the transcendental powers that exist for him.

In the world catechism of 1993 the Roman Catholic church believes that magic acts and practices and wizardry are forms practiced to acquire secret powers for one's own use and benefit. Just as reprehensible are efforts to gain supernatural power over another person in this way, even if it results only in improving health. These efforts represent a grave offence against the virtue of worshipping God. Such activities are particularly to be condemned if the intention is to inflict damage on another person or if these activities aim to take possession of demons. No less reprehensible is the wearing of amulets. However, the question arises whether everything that is carried out by the Roman Catholic church is itself not also influenced by magic. What is the difference between a magic amulet and a religiously motivated amulet? There is a thin line between magic and religion when the belief of the people is expressed.

There are two distinct areas of magic, white magic and black magic which have to be defined. There is a difference between permitted natural magic “*magia naturalis*” and forbidden demonic magic “*magia daemoniaca*”. Through a pact with the devil, *magia daemoniaca* tries to make use of its occult forces. Certain actions of the magician with concrete objects and symbols are seen in black magic as an invitation to the devil to get in touch with the person. Medieval theologians and from later periods presumed that manipulation of certain plants, stones or animals together with their

gestures, manipulations and words was part of the communication with demons, an important component in the communication system through which a pact could be concluded. At this time a pact with the devil formed the basis of the Christian understanding of magic.

In the Middle Ages Thomas von Aquin (1225-1274), and the Franciscans Bonaventura (1221-1274) and Albertus Magnus (ca. 1200-1280) believed that every magic activity, even natural magic, led to a pact with the devil, and therefore represented a decline in faith, which was reprehensible. Followers of *magia naturalis* believed that their activities with secret forces were in harmony with religion. They endeavoured to recognize hidden forces brought by the godlike creation and to use this for the benefit of the people. The meaning of *magia naturalis* is knowledge of nature, the realization of God's creation and with it recognition of God.

In sum, the meaning of magic is to make use of forces which are hidden or occult, by using certain objects to achieve certain aims (Bachter 2001: 12ff.).

Doctrine of Signature and Sympathy

The three principles sympathy, doctrine of signature and analogy are fundamental to the understanding of *magia naturalis* and the resulting magic-superstitious training. According to Bachter the principle of sympathy consists in the fact that all animated and inanimate objects of the cosmos are sympathetic and in secret relationship to each other (Bachter 2001: 15).

According to Wieshammer magic treatment in folk medicine is regarded as sympathy. The principle of sympathy is inherently to be found in their nature and in no ideology or medical concept. In folk medicine there are procedures known as sympathetic healing cures which attempt to address human sorrow with certain means. In each period of time people have barely a doubt to the effectiveness of these procedures. The person who is absorbed by magic is in a constant state of communication with the manifestations of nature and thereby regards himself as inevitably integrated into this order. Everyday life is formed by equivalents

(sympathies) and resistances (antipathies). The magically formed person lives in a world of symbols and signs which satisfies his need for constant exchange with his environment. Astrology, simple surgical interventions, herb medicine, sympathy, nature worship and religious belief form a closed unity in folk medicine (Wieshammer 1999).

With sympathy, according to Bachter, one strives to get closer to the secret of things by intense study of nature. In the external form of an object or living being one sees an indication of its corresponding effect. The doctrine of signature “*signatura plantarum*” develops out of this which assumes that diseases with natural substances can be cured because of a certain similarity with the condition caused by the disease or with the affected part of the body. The doctrine of signature is convinced that the internal being and essence of things are already recognised by their form. An important advocate and renewer of the doctrine of signature was Paracelsus who for example, recognized the shame of man in the form of a root of a green-winged orchid and concluded that this root elevated the libido and power of man. So, for example, they applied thistles for pains in one’s side, yellow blossom for bile, red blossom for blood and walnuts for the brain. These sympathy treatments were extracts of plants, the healing effect of which is recognized by the exterior plant-like manifestation, the “*signatura dei*”.

From the Middle Ages to about 1700 magic was an occupation of scholars, as for example Johann Faust, born in Knittlingen (ca. 1480 – ca. 1540), the German surgeon, jurist, theologian, philosopher, and the magician Heinrich Cornelius, better known as Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535), and also Paracelsus. They were the most famous representatives between scholar and charlatan, scientist and wizard. Together with their colleagues in the whole of Europe, these scholars belonged to those who pursued magic as a science and a philosophy, who researched the influence of the stars and the relationship of macrocosm and microcosm which formulate the doctrine of signatures or cogitate about the Jewish secret apprenticeship of the Cabbala. A presupposition for the understanding of magic was being able to read and write and to possess a

linguistic knowledge of Greek, Hebrew and Latin. Therefore it was mostly scholars who were involved in magic and simple people like craftsmen, merchants or farmers could pursue magic only to a limited extent until 1700.

Magic was no longer favourable to scholars as modern science developed in the course of the Enlightenment. Magic was transformed into so-called “superstition”. That which had been regarded as evidence of deepest cosmic secrets two generations ago, was now rejected as irrational and “superstitious”. The result was that all these trainings which were based on sympathy and antipathy, on the doctrine of signature or other magic principles were now rejected as “superstition”. However, paradoxically the Enlightenment led by the secularization of thinking, the improvement of education and expansion of the communication resulted in magic and “superstitious images” being more widely spread out through the population. The Enlightenment is a process of secularization and the secularization of thinking and action. Thus, the predominant power of the Roman Catholic church over the life of people was decisively broken. After this loss of power, the fear of being persecuted and burned as a sorcerer or magician was banned. Interested persons could now concern themselves more safely with magic, including forbidden black magic (Bachter 2001: 15f.).

Age of Enlightenment and Wizard Books

As Bachter (2001) notes, the knowledge of Hebrew, Greek and Latin was one of the pre-suppositions for dealing with magic till 1700. The Enlightenment also brought a change in education from Latin into German, the body of thought of magic was now written in German. Thus it could be read and understood by a large part of the population. A constantly growing number of the population could also read and understand texts, as a result of compulsory education and teaching at this time. In the Enlightenment of the 18th century books on magic, a special form of manuscript, circulated. Magic, which had been reduced to so-called “superstition”, also spread into the most isolated villages with these books. Their texts were recipe-like manuals to empower users with occult forces. They were needed to exorcise demons so as to secure their power, particularly

in finding hidden treasures. These texts were also used to preserve the body and life of people and animals or to recover health. Finally they should be a protection against witchcraft and the spell of love, but also protect and increase possessions.

Books on magic often contained false year of publication dates. The author was synonymous with a famous scholar or biblical figure, such as Albertus Magnus, Faust, Mose or Salomon. An increasing number of handwritten and printed books on magic was recorded from the middle of the 17th century after the end of the 30-Years-War. The number of the printed books on magic which had been banished by publishers, but also books for private domestic use and copied by hand, rose significantly from 1800 onwards. In the most varying of families all magic recipes were taken from these writings, so-called house books, which families needed as guidance for their health. These books on magic were also used to protect their homes and their livelihood from natural disasters or damage arising from supernatural causes. Such house books usually originated from the 19th century and are still, albeit rarely, to be found in wealthy families to this day.

In summary it can be said that the corresponding circulation of printed and handwritten books on magic was only possible in the Enlightenment under the appropriate conditions. Firstly, after the loss of power of the church, the body of thought on magic was exempt from punishment. The distribution of written material on magic took place in the education of the poor population when Latin was changed to German as well as an increasing demand for writing and reading skills. Writings on magic became enormously popular in rural as well as in urban milieus of the rational modern world (Bachter 2001: 17).

“Schwendsack”, “Stemboring” and the State of the Moon

The majority of the Tyrolean population, according to Merhart (1988), could hardly escape the influence of the beliefs in “superstition”, faith, magic and sympathy and what they entailed. Some people believed that illness came from miraculous forces and that a person could also only be healed in this manner. Therefore it

was extremely important that the healer be a strong personality with a powerful aura. The more convincing the healer was, the stronger the confidence of the patient was and the more intensely he believed in improvement or even cure of the disease. Complete trust of the patient was demanded particularly when the healer used exceptionally painful and soul-shaking methods. It is often the physical pain or mental emotion which determines the turning point that can define the applied healing therapy. As such, the patient’s enormous confidence should be in harmony with the healer and his methods of healing as well as the patient’s high expectations of a rapid cure.

A characteristic of healing is for the majority of the healers to choose the right moment for the treatment taking the time into account as well as the phases of the moon. It is not uncommon for a patient to rush to be treated at midnight because precisely this moment is optimal. The unusual time, the journey at night to the healer and the late meeting also arouses intense positive expectations on the part of the help-seeking patient which are usually sufficient to mobilize internal forces to be receptive both bodily and spiritually to a positive cure. This “time magic” has also connotations for the collecting of medicinal herbs. Only at the correct time of day or night and the phase of the moon do the herbs gathered develop their specific effect. Old documents give instructions that certain herbs be picked only during the day or the night, with the waxing and waning of the moon or in certain cases at sunrise on midsummer day and on one of the three days prior to confession and communion carried out by a virgin. In particular the phase of the moon has a decisive influence on the collecting of herbs. Some plants are only to be picked three days after a new moon observing certain signs.

The state of the moon is observed closely and for certain operative procedures it must have a specific constellation to the earth. Before every intervention the state of the earth satellite is precisely clarified. With a waning moon only operations removing internal matter are carried out. The waning moon guarantees no repeated growth. In contrast, everything is operated that grows or heals together with a waxing moon.

In Tyrol Tuesdays and Thursdays are con-

sidered in particular, as “Schwendtage”, in which certain interventions are to be refrained from as far as possible. However, great importance is attached to “Schwenden” when swellings, proliferations etc. have to disappear. To carry this out, a “Schwendsack” – a bag made out of linen - is used, which has cast a spell on its secret contents. For a long period the contents in the “Schwendsack” are top secret. Nobody dares to open such a linen bag to satisfy his curiosity as the fear of retaliation of evil spirits is too great. Even today farmers occasionally work with “Schwendsäcken” or “-taschen” sometimes in isolated settlements of Tyrol. Only recently did people open these linen bags to solve their secrets and to show them to the public. In most cases the contents consists of bone or bone parts and diverse small tubers and roots. For the application these “Schwendsäcke” are not only used in human medicine but also in veterinary medicine. Although the effects on humans of the “Schwendsack” through the enormous expectations of persons on the sack might be explicable, the question still remains as to the impact on sick animals.

Another method of healing is “stemboring” of the disease. In this case the rural doctor empowers himself in ways known only to him and he uses this like an instrument. The healer goes either alone or together with the patient to the forest, bores a hole, preferably in the trunk of a larch tree, places the disease under the influence of reciting incantations in the hole and closes it firmly with a larch pitch or certain secret mixtures so that the disease cannot escape any more. The disease is thus exorcised from the patient and he is considered cured (Merhart 1988: 12ff).

Rural Customs and their Meaning in Folk Medicine

In Tyrol certain customs are carried out which have an effect on folk medicine. According to Merhart the „tree cult“ is a ritual where parts of the tree or shrub, and particularly the twigs, play an important role. For example on Palm Sunday, twigs are tied up into “palm branches” and displayed in the house as a blessing and protection against disease and plagues. Individual palm branches are stuck into the corners and middle of fields, as protection

against hail, but also to increase the yield of crop. To improve one’s own health, particularly sore throats, if three palm catkins are swallowed, one will be protected for one year. If this is carried out on an empty stomach, one is free from temperature for the same period.

Birch twigs are closely connected with the secret of life. These twigs possess a magic effect on the prevention of disease when a Corpus Christi procession passes by. They protect the courtyard against lightning and the cattle against evil. If the twigs are placed in a field, they protect the crops. If you make blackberry twigs into big loops and sick people crawl through them and back, they can be healed. The twigs seize the disease and extract it from the body. However, if you consume blackberries during the day after Holy Bartholomäus, the disease could return. The hazel-bush has always been regarded as holy and should always be included in a consecration bush. It protects from death by lightning. Effective healing powers have also been attributed to the elder bush. Because it alleviates much suffering, it should always be included in a medicine chest. Elder is also well suited to “stemboring” the disease. Certain herbs such as the mandrake – Alruna the All-knowing – have a magic effect. The name “valerian” is derived from the God Balder. The designation thunder is a derivative of the weather God Donar. Other derivatives are the thunder beard or the thunder rose (alpine rose) and the thunder broom (mistletoe).

Depending on the geographical area and the vegetation predominant there, individual “consecration bushes” are made and consecrated on Ascension Day. The following plants which are used as a kind of tea for healing purposes should also be included in consecration bushes: valerian, hibiscus, hazel-bush, Saint-John’s-wort, camomile, great mullein, mint, parsley, thyme and vermouth. Not only trees, herbs and shrubs play an important role in folk medicine, but also water springs. Churches are frequently build at the site of these springs and are called “spring churches”. The water of these springs are directly connected with certain saints (Merhart 1988: 67ff.).

Blood-letting, Examination of Urine and the Tyrolean Peasant Doctors

Blood-letting was a well-regarded means of diagnosis and treatment until the 19th century. Since barber-surgeons subsist, it was stipulated that the patient should run up to one mile before the bleeding to supply the body sufficiently with blood. Consulting rooms should be free of draught and after the treatment the patient should rest for a good hour. For its application, the movement of the stars had to be taken into account and advice had to be sought from an astrologer to determine the most suitable days. To indicate these days to the simple people in advance, a diagram representation – the “little bleeding man” – helped to ascertain which days in the year and at which part of the body the blood-letting should take place. Up to the beginning of the 19th century there were almost only calendars which illustrated the bleeding man.

In blood-letting it is important which of the veins is opened. With liver congestion, for example, the vein in the right hand has to be opened, but with spleen congestion the vein in the left hand. For the purpose of vein opening the appropriate part of the body is rubbed by the healer with powerful movements of his hand until it becomes warm, the area is then tied to prevent the blood from flowing and the vein is opened with a lancet. The blood is then caught in a brass, ceramic or tin dish measuring 1½ to 2 pounds. After the blood-letting the blood count is examined, the time spread for the analysis is based on the clotting of the blood. It is reported of patients who faint during blood-letting or who generally do not agree with the blood-letting process (Merhart 1988: 28f.).

Tyrolean peasant doctors who were particularly respected by the country-folk had something in common: diagnosis by urine examination, unlimited confidence when the “quack” succeeded in determining not only the diagnosis, but also the age, family situation and number of children the patient had based on the contents of urine in a glass, the so-called “mirror” (Merhart 1988: 19). Since antiquity until the present, urine has been examined, and according to Merhart it had its heyday in orthodox medicine from the 13th to the 16th century. After several changes its importance diminished

and diagnosis by dint of a urinal become the main practice with barber-surgeons, peasant doctors, non-medical practitioners and quacks, later partly also with orthodoxally-trained country doctors. In some places today this simple form of urine testing is carried out under the principles of the “four humours” teachings. The theory as such defines urine as the concentration of the four humours, its colour, concentration and sediment gives insight into the respective illness. Since antiquity people have also believed that dark urine is a bad omen for the patient’s future, regardless of health.

The colour of the urine reveals the so-called primary qualities. The more warmth a disease radiates from the body, the darker the urine is. A 20-colour scale is used to determine the nuances of colour. The urine from a person suffering from cholera for example is extremely dark and barely concentrated, evidence that indicates that the cholera is a hot dry disease. If the urine is oily, tissue is dissolving and the disease is undermining the health of the patient. However, not only the colour but also the concentration and sediment has to be closely examined. Only these three factors together will result in a definite diagnosis.

Urine is also a diagnostic aid for the location of the disease in the body. By examining a container full of urine, the highest layer of the liquid is in connection with the head, the second layer with the breast, third layer with the belly and the lowest layer with the bladder, kidneys and the genital organs of the patient. Later on the separate layers are mixed by shaking the urine glass and then diagnosed. In addition almost all peasant doctors take the urine glass to a window to examine it in daylight. Some people suspect that this treatment is dispensable and is only an attempt at magic. A psychological side-effect is that the patient feels important, he is also flattered and taken seriously by everyone. In so doing, he develops expectations which are advantageous for the healer. There is also only a small number of barber-surgeons and quacks who are active as dishonest fortune-tellers by using urine examination to get rich in a fraudulent way (Merhart 1988: 37ff.).

Independent of this, Tyrol produces excellent folk healers. They contribute to improving people’s health mostly without requesting mate-

rial compensation or similar. These peasant doctors not only treat the needy population, but also the most valuable possession of the farmer, his livestock. Although peasant doctors have no formal medical training compared to barber-surgeons, they are certainly highly regarded and respected personalities. Their medical knowledge is based on old writings such as those of Paracelsus, on writings which have been handed down from generation to generation and also on their own study of nature. Last but not least their knowledge is based on their own long-term experience of healing, often for periods of decades. Practices of “superstition” are also included.

The following detailed description illustrates the life and work of the peasant doctors based on several examples from the north Tyrolean area.

The Marxer

The Marxer, whose biographical details are unknown, was regarded by the local population as the black smith of Oberperfuß in the region of Sellraintal, and was man of distinct coarse, durable nature. He worked in Götzens near Innsbruck and practised partly using brute force and mental suffering. His “wondrous cures” were often considered as a last resort and so afflicted people come to him from far and wide. His physical appearance and primitive unwieldy manner, sustained by success earned him great respect in all social classes, although his painful methods were feared.

One of his particular methods was the application of a pitch cap against scabs of the scalp. The hair was first shorn with a knife, the head was then covered with a warmed up pitch made out of leather, this was then rapidly put on to the patient’s head until it had cooled off. Later on the patient stands on the table or a chair. The Marxer then tied a cord to a hook on the ceiling and a loop in the pitch cap, whereby the suffering patient jumped to the ground and the cap remained behind with the skin of the scalp. Afterwards it was assumed that the disease had been warded off. There is no indication that such mistreatment would ever have to be repeated.

The removal of tapeworms belonged to another of his unorthodox treatments with the prohibi-

tion of food for several days, followed by eating honey mixed with a weakly poisoned liquid. The removal of “finger worms” or “Assl” was almost as painful as the use of the pitch cap. At that time many people suffered from finger worms, a bacterial infection with pus, which appeared in fingers or palms because of lack of hygiene. The Marxer here used a self-made remedy, the so-called “squeezing method”. He took the affected hand or finger and pressed it together like a vice. To measure the length of time he used a live toad which he squeezed in the other hand. He stopped pressing both hands only when all the juices of the toad had been squeezed out. He preferred a field toad which seemed most resistant for these purposes. This cruelty to animals was tolerated because of the belief that finger worm would not heal as long as the toad was alive and that the toad itself attributed magic forces to the user. Only few patients remained conscious during this treatment.

For dislocations and fractures of the leg the Marxer used his own self-developed “dried plaster recipe”. He made an ointment out of larch pitch and protein, spread it on linen cloth and laid it on the afflicted area. The dried plaster remained there until it dropped off by itself. He deliberately ignored the fact that the skin was badly affected, that hair fell out and the treatment caused such pain.

The Marxer was also the inventor of “healing water” which consisted of strong wine vinegar and a mercury preparation. To apply this to wounds at extremities, frostbitten joints and other diseases of the joint, he boiled an appropriate amount of the substance in an iron pan, soaked it in a linen cloth and laid it on the affected area. Although his coarseness and crude manner were known, he had a steady flow of patients including the “Hearischen” from Innsbruck, the higher social classes (Merhart 1988: 16ff.).

The Gruenhaeusler

The Gruenhaeusler, also “Gruene”, whose real name was Martin Steinlechner, was born in 1825 in the so-called “Gruenhaeusl” in Fiecht in the middle of the Unterinntal, where his parents had a farm. His father was a peasant doctor and passed his knowledge on to his son.

His mother, born Anna Speckbacher, came from Gnadenwald. The Grüne was the fifth of nine children and had an orderly but strict upbringing. It was this very severity which formed him and which he praised in later life. He was a quiet, almost melancholic person. He only had a few years education at the country school in Vomp and had to earn his upkeep at a farm in Absam at an early age. He took care of the sick cattle there and little by little of the farmer's family and staff. Gradually he applied his knowledge also to the inhabitants of the neighbouring farms and his talent rapidly spread. He continuously expanded his knowledge by the study of the herbal books and books on treatment of his father who died in 1850. He was then offered a job as a veterinarian by the municipality. In 1857 he married and moved into the house of his wife in Breitenweg in Hall, where he established a surgery with waiting room, consulting room and a small pharmacy. At the height of his patient visits he treated up to 60 patients from all social classes daily and they had to wait for hours to see him. Occasionally, patients sent desperate letters to him and he replied personally. For some patients he was the last anchor, the last hope, particularly when orthodox medicine had been exhausted. His treatment was with the exception of wealthy people free of charge. For medicine he prescribed herbs made out of different essences which he developed in his pharmacy. He requested a fee for this and he gained a certain prosperity. He bought the herbs from local herbalists or from pharmacies in Innsbruck. Regrettably none of his recipes exist any more.

He differed in personality notably from other peasant doctors. He was less coarse and crude, but a true Tyrolean, regularly attending meetings of the "Tiroler Schuetzen" and accompanying them on festive occasions. He never wanted to live outside Tyrol, not even for a short time. This attitude was even more remarkable because he sent his manufactured ointments and other remedies which were in big demand to patients all over Austria, Bavaria, Bohemia, Italy, Saxony, Switzerland, Hungary and Wurttemberg. The interest in ordering by mail was disproportionately higher with Gruenhaeusler than with all other peasant doctors in Tyrol. Dispatched medicines increased further during the war years from

1859 to 1866 for injured and wounded soldiers of his homeland. He sent boxes full of medicines to the areas of battle, particularly to treat the circulating dysentery there. During his later years he was supported in his practice by one of his sons. His recognition and respect by those seeking help was so great that doctors out of envy tried to banish him or sue him. Because it could not be proved that he had committed any identifiable offence, he was found innocent despite two court-cases. As a result of this dispute and because of his enormous popularity, numerous people signed a petition and sent it to the authorities to grant him official permission to perform as a "doctor" (Merhart 1988: 32ff.).

The Kiendler

The Kiendler, his real name was Alois Neuner, who was born in 1863 in Mieming/Fiecht in Oberinntal lived and worked up to his death in 1934 in Zillertal. He was the embodiment of a Tyrolean "original", at the same time he was a highly respected personality and everybody spoke of him as the star among peasant doctors. Neuner wanted to become a vet after finishing elementary school and in 1887 he applied to work with the gifted folk healer, the so-called "Graberwirt" in Hippach, who worked as an innkeeper and healer of sick cattle. Neuner showed great talent and joy in his new job, and the "Graberwirt" promoted and supported him wherever he could. Neuner was then often called out to treat sick cattle which he liked to do. On some of his visits it transpired that not only the cattle but also members of the farm were ill, so gradually he started to tend to sick people too and more and more he began to also consult the sick inhabitants of Zillertal. One of his patients was the daughter of the so-called "Kiendlerhof" at Schwendau, Maria Rieser, whom he married in 1889. From then on Alois Neuner became the Kiendler. His profession improved considerably when the uncle of his wife left him a large collection of old healing recipes. Based on these recipes his success in healing and his reputation grew. Although he accepted no money for his services, he was grateful for the natural products and voluntary help he received in his agricultural work, which he pursued alongside. He became well-off, was financially involved in the local mines and joint stock holder of the Zillertal Railway. He even had plans to press pine oil for healing treat-

ment, but had to give this idea up when the purchase of large acreage of pine forest failed in the area of the Nordkette near Hall. His talent was not only recognised in Zillertal but soon all Tyrol. The 11 o'clock train of the Zillertal Railway, called the "Neuner-train" or "Kiendler-train" by the locals, brought between 40 and 50 patients daily to Hippach. From there they walked to Schwendau with a little flask of urine in their bag. Like almost all peasant doctors, the Kiendler also diagnosed through the examination of urine. He carried out his treatments in the simplest of the farmers' wood-panelled room which contained dozens of local birds in birdcages. He liked their chirping which helped him to concentrate on the respective patient. In this little room there was also an impressive number of books too – more books on art than medical books – because he liked to paint for relaxation, when he was not weaving or knitting. Other ways of relaxation was listening to music with wind instruments and an old water mill which he operated himself and whose mechanic sound was music in his ears.

However, when he treated people he was extremely coarse and rough in words and deeds. For instance, a woman from the Pinzgau once came to him with an extremely painful arm after she had been given wrong medical treatment. He pretended spontaneously to kill her with an axe which caused her to faint. Using her unconsciousness as a narcosis substitute, he was able to break her arm, reset it and when she woke up, her arm was already in a cast. Another person who had become mute after a severe fright and with a long history of suffering the Kiendler kept waiting the whole day, then told him to follow him into the forest that evening. He then tied the unsuspecting man to a tree and raised suddenly his hidden axe to strike him. At the same time he yelled at the man with swear words, and told him that if he did not talk, he would not be able to scream when he was about to be axed. He then pretended to do this and at that moment the man let out a blood-curdling cry and was able to speak again immediately. The cured patient then took the Kiendler to court because of his doubtful healing methods. He lost his case because an expert maintained that language lost by fright could be regained by fright. Also the accusations of others who were against his

methods of treatment and the medicine prescribed were also rejected and the case ended in acquittal. His most famous patient was the German Emperor Wilhelm II. who requested the Kiendler to come to Bad Ischl by train to treat the monarch and who greeted him with his inherently kind and characteristic choice of words.

The older the Kiendler became, however, the more irritable and nervous he became because of constant pressure. As a result he was much coarser and tougher with his wife and his eight children. If he felt especially bad, he retreated into his mill and kept his patients waiting excessively. Six of his children took up the occupation of healer using him as their role-model.

His particular specialization was the treating and straightening of legs and because of his vast experience in this field, none of his Zillertaler patients had to go to hospital. He was known for his technology of leg-straightening way over the border and patients were sometimes carried to the Kiendler in back-baskets from the Pustertal. For these patients he created limited accommodation space in his home, similar to an early form of sanatorium. Most of his patients recovered after two weeks so that they could be dismissed. The Kiendler also instructed his children in the art of the setting bones so that the girls could later be sent out to children in remote rural communities and the boys to adults. The reason for this particular division of labour was because the method of treatment required much physical strength and even the boys sometimes needed family assistance. Because the treatment was extremely painful he therefore had to use additional physical strength to control the patient. The Kiendler gave plenty of alcohol to adults before an intervention and then went to work with skilful movements and his self-made technology.

His other specialization was blood-stanching – restraining the flow of blood – especially from wounds and dental treatment. For the latter he had in his possession only four pliers for the treatment of children's root extractions and for general interventions in upper and lower teeth (Merhart 1988: 47ff.).

For rheumatism the Kiendler prescribed a special ointment to rub on from his collection of

recipes of different extracts including fat and oils. For states of exhaustion, sciatica and rheumatism he preferred a hay bath. He also did not hesitate to prescribe the use of “burning hay” for pneumonia or pleurisy, although it is to be noted that the application of hay baths was not entirely free of risk with skin diseases, lung diseases or circulatory disturbances.

The hay developed its healing effect in a humid steady temperature between 40° and 60°C whereby the patient copiously perspired. For hay baths mainly arnica, mountain camomile, mountain yarrows, common speedwell, noble rhombus, gentian, yoke primroses, corn salad and spike lavender were used. Through a special way of storing the hay, an intense lengthy fermentation process brought forth a “burning” process, the temperature of the hay could rise in isolated cases up to about 60°C. In summer hay which had been harvested kept its healing effect until late into the winter. However, because of the intense effectiveness of “burning hay”, it was appropriate to use it only in short time-spans for new patients. After it was applied, the patient was quickly wrapped in a linen cloth and the Kiendler frequently prescribed a specific herbal medicine to strengthen the effect of the hay bath (Merhart 1988: 107f.).

With the death of Alois Neuner in 1934 Tyrol lost one of its most important peasant doctors of the old school.

The Natterer Doctor

The Natterer, whose real name was Johann Abentung, was born in 1914 in Natters near Innsbruck where he also died in 1986. He had to fight predominantly with the disparity between his patients who supported him and the reproaches of doubters, particularly from the medical profession. The latter accused him of quackery and ignorance and exploitation of human stupidity using hocus-pocus methods, although they admitted he had sound business sense in achieving his goals. He was therefore accused of wrong diagnoses with negative consequences for the patient. However, no doubt he was endowed with an extraordinarily strong aura and was characterized by goodness and understanding. He had a deep sense of responsibility and self-assurance and without hesita-

tion he referred patients with diseases that were outside his knowledge to a specialist or directly to a hospital. Paradoxically many medical specialists sent in turn seemingly incurable patients to him in spite of doubts that most likely existed. The social spectrum of the patients came from all social classes and from all parts of Tyrol as well as Bavaria, Switzerland and about one third from South Tyrol. Indispensable was that patients had to bring a flask filled with urine to examine and from which the Natterer made his diagnosis. He always gave much time to each patient, spoke in detail of their illness and provided hope about the forthcoming treatment and its effect. He therefore gave a positive impression as well as inspiring confidence and raising hope – conditions which were the first steps towards improvement. The Natterer had a gift of being able to penetrate through the external façade into the inside of the diseased body to catch a glimpse of the soul. Particularly in the case of mentally sick people did he achieve his most noteworthy success.

The Natterer started his career as a cattle healer and did his apprenticeship with Kiendler in Zillertal. His main focus was folk healing and where possible he used liniment, ointments and blends of tea which he produced with his brother. The healing urge in Natters was very much a family affair. From the eight children one studied medicine and worked for several years with his father. On his death he took over the practiced. The Natterer’s main emphasis was on internal medicine. He deviated from the practice of his instructor Kiendler in that he did not treat fractures, and particularly not broken bones himself, but referred these patients to the old Nagelin in Matrei. He also never treated neurologically-derived diseases. Without hesitation he would tell a woman who was suffering from trigeminal neuralgia that she would find no relieve from this ailment from him. Whether it was chronic headaches, gout or childlessness, his type of treatment was always very similar without deviating too much in its application. He was particularly popular amongst young married women who sought aid because of childlessness. Apparently he was able to help numerous women with his authenticity and optimism.

He proved his skill with a man who already had

several hospital consultations because of unbearable pains in his back. According to reliable sources, the patient had gone to see a physician in hospital but after several examinations no cause could be found and he was sent home as a possible impostor because they did not believe him. In desperation the patient turned to a friend for help who took him with a small flask filled with urine to the Natterer. After hearing the sad story of the patient, the Natterer rose, took the urine flask to the window and examined its contents thoroughly. Suddenly he turned round and told him the cause of the recurring suffering was a pinched nerve. For treatment he gave the man a black plaster to put on his back, telling the patient that it would burn. It did burn infernally and only with great effort did he manage to cope. Henceforth every two weeks his wife drove to the Natterer with a flask filled with urine and came home with a new plaster. Slowly the pains disappeared and with them the depression too. After approximately nine months the patient had recovered and went to the Natterer himself to express his thanks.

In 1954 there was great indignation among much of the Tyrolean population when the Natterer was sentenced by court to two months prison because of unauthorized use of medicine and quack medicine. The local press, however, devoted much to this topic, praising the charitable work and the success of the accused and exposing his accusers to ridicule. The basis of the complaint was a legal regulation introduced in 1949 which significantly curtailed the practices of a healer. At his funeral active members of the church choir and sponsors of the local brass band as well as doctors paid tribute to him with due recognition and appreciation as a healing practitioner (Merhart 1988: 109ff.).

The Gerharter or Gerhartler

The Gerharter or Gerhartler, his real name was Anton Auer, was born in 1806 in Haiming in central Oberinntal. He lived from 1840 up to his death in 1881 in the “Gerhartshof” near Wildermieming in Oberinntal. The family farm which belonged to the monastery of Stams bore the name of the Cistercian monk, Gerhart, who worked there a long time as administrator. In contrast to almost all other Tyroleans peasant

doctors, the Gerharter had the advantage of a higher school education, namely at the Franciscan secondary school in Hall. Because of the poor financial state of his parents, it was not possible to pay the school bills due to the care needed for his numerous brothers and sisters. When an elderly aunt recognized his hidden talents, she supported him as his patroness and he was able to attend the boarding school in Hall. After her death the financial resources ebbed away and a university degree became more and more unlikely. He then started to become acquainted with agriculture. His intellect, which had been sharpened by his schooling, helped him in his studies of nature. He devoted himself intensely to learning about healing plants and their effects and he began to collect them. Relatively quickly he started to use his collection for healing people. Still a young man, he began to acquire a reputation of a “miracle doctor”. To the outside world, he was a primitive farmer’s son with an inborn sense of dealing with sick people, his reliable diagnoses the result of examination of urine specimens. Some peasant doctors were also collectors and users of herbs using the rich flora of Tyrol which was available to them. The Gerharter belonged to this group.

He treated poor people free of charge, from the rich he accepted voluntary donations and natural products. The flow of people seeking help became so great that it was possible for him by the age of 34 years to acquire the farm “Gerhartshof” from the voluntary cash donations. The Gerharter was not only successful as peasant doctor but also as a farmer. He transformed the business of cattle-breeding into being economically viable and he was soon managing his farm successfully. His accomplishments grew constantly even beyond the borders of Tyrol, simultaneously the number of his opponents grew. As a believing Christian he went to church every Sunday and afterwards to a country pub, where he treated the poorer people free of charge. During the week he tended to predominantly wealthy city people on his farm and on Sundays he treated farmers from the surroundings in the pub. The flow of farmers seeking help became so intense that representatives of the medical profession brought a suit against him, charging him of being a charlatan. All these accusations were, however, brushed aside. The attacks from

doctors rapidly died down when the Gerharter attained considerable recognition with his successful healing of a Bavarian aristocrat who intervened with the local authority. When this became known, other attacks stopped and no other repressive measures were taken against the respected peasant doctor.

At the “Gerhartshof” even the simplest luxuries such as real coffee and white bread were prohibited on request of the undemanding and simply-living Anton Auer. He represents the view that righteous farmers should only eat what they grow in their own fields. He kept to this philosophy his whole life. Because he lived so modestly, he became prosperous and he was able to provide his children with an excellent school education and training in outstanding educational facilities. At his funeral the frugal and outstanding peasant doctor with his extensive knowledge of herbs was acknowledged and appreciated from all social classes. Remarkable is that after the death of the Gerharter the Telfser doctor, Franz Rimml, used his recipes in his practice. However, only one single recipe for stomach stabilization was handed down (Merhart 1988: 41f.).

Discussion

It can be concluded that the disappearance of the last peasant doctor without academic

medical training but with their coarse, boorish manner were highly respected personalities in great demand and their demise a great loss for the welfare of people and animals. With their self-taught knowledge from old writings such as Paracelsus, their oral traditions, their in-depth study of nature and their longstanding experience of practical therapy with valuable recipes of medicinal herbs, the disappearance of these peasant doctors also represented a deplorable and irreversible loss for folk culture and folk medicine, not only in Tyrol but way beyond.

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Book Reviews

Dan Bensky, Steven Clavey, Erich Stoeger, Andrew Gamble: Chinese Herbal Medicine: Materia Medica. Third edition, 2004, Eastland Press.

The first edition of *Chinese Herbal Medicine: Materia Medica* was published in 1986, and the revised edition in 1993. This book has served me as an excellent reference text since 1997 and I was quite curious about the new (third) edition coming. The size of this edition is quite remarkable: while the revised edition has 556 pages the third edition now covers 1308 pages. Of course there have been a lot of changes, improvements and updates. Two new co-authors contributed their special expertise: Steven Clavey, an author and practitioner from Melbourne, Australia, applied his clinical and scholarly expertise to expand the traditional background and usage of each herb. He was primarily responsible for in-depth discussions of the herbs in the *commentary, mechanisms of selected combinations, comparisons with other herbs, traditional contraindications, and nomenclature and preparation* sections. The other new co-author is Erich Stoeger from Austria, trained in both traditional Chinese and modern pharmacology. He has done extensive work in herb identification, which is reflected in this book. He was primarily responsible for the *identification* section as well as *quality criteria, major known chemical constituents, alternate species and local variants, adulterations, alternate names, and additional product information*.

So let's take a closer look at the organisation and the topics of the book: In the introduction the reader can find information like the brief history of medicine and herbs in China, the development of the *Materia Medica*, and the development of herbal theory. It is interesting to read that the *Classic of the Materia Medica* makes no attempt to forge a theoretical link between the herbal tastes and characteristics on the one hand, and the detailed therapeutic effects on the other. The attempt to forge a concrete link between empirical knowledge of the herbs and classical theory began in the Song dynasty (960-1279) and was fully developed during the Jin (1195-1233) and Yuan (1234-1369) dynasties. The authors do not just claim this statement, but actually put a footnote so that the reader can retrace the source at the end of the introduction! I am delighted because from my experience usually medical doctors just claim something without indicating the underlying source. In this chapter, also other important issues are discussed, e.g. the authors explain the various methods of preparation like pills, powders, syrups, plasters, medicinal wines and decoction of the herbs. Further on there is a chapter of how to use this book and explanations of the sections under each entry.

The introduction is followed by eighteen chapters of Chinese herbs with detailed descriptions. At the beginning of each chapter the reader finds a clearly laid out overview of all the herbs discussed in this particular chapter. In this summary the herbs are already listed by specific relevant classifications. For example, chapter two with the title "Herbs that Clear Heat" is divided into herbs that drain *fire* like Gypsum fibrosum (Shi gao), herbs that cool the *blood* like Cortex Moutan (Mu dan pi), herbs that clear *heat* and dry *dampness* like Radix Scutellariae (Huang qin), herbs that clear *heat* and resolve *toxicity* like Flos Lonicerae (Jin yin hua), and herbs that clear *heat* from *deficiency* like Herba Artemisiae annuae (Qing hao). Before the particular herbs are discussed in detail there is a general explanation of their actions and effects. For example in the already mentioned chapter two there is a short explanation of the terminus *heat* and the symptoms that can occur when *heat* is diagnosed in a Chinese medical syndrome (e.g. dry throat, red face, red eyes, dry stools, dark and scanty urine, yellow tongue coating, rapid pulse, fever etc.). Then the first group of herbs in this chapter – the herbs that drain *fire* – is shortly explained. E.g., the authors state that the herbs of this group are among the coldest in the *materia medica*. They are used for treating high fever, irritability, thirst, and delirium associated with febrile disease. Following this general explanation the particular herbs of this group are discussed. At each entry the reader can find at first a listing of the names by which an herb is identified. This includes the Chinese characters (with the simplified characters in parenthesis, if significantly different from the traditional form), the *pinyin* transliteration, the pharmaceutical name, English common name, and the Japanese and Korean names. The names in languages other than Chinese are for reference only, and not for identification. Some substances do not have a Korean or Japanese name. The Latin-based

pharmaceutical name in combination with the *pinyin* is important because by itself, the *pinyin* is unreliable. This is shown in the number of herbs with the same *pinyin* in the section “Pinyin-Pharmaceutical Cross Reference”. Bensky et al. state that also the use of just the pharmaceutical name also has its drawbacks. Often the standard pharmaceutical name that is chosen by scholars who work in this field lacks the species name, or fails to refer to the set number of species that can serve as the particular herb. The authors give an example: the pharmaceutical name *Taraxaci Herba* might refer to any number of species; however, once it is paired with the appropriate *pinyin* – *pú gōng yīng* – it refers only to one of the two *Taraxacum* species used in Chinese medicine, *Taraxacum sinicum* or *Taraxacum mongolicum*. Therefore the reader also can find the standard species of a particular herb. The standard species used in the book are those listed by the official Chinese Pharmacopoeia Committee of the People’s Republic of China.

The identification and different names are followed by a quite interesting information: the text in which the herb or substance first appeared. Then the properties of the herb are listed, that is to say the taste and the thermal effect, the channels that are entered by the herb, the key characteristics, the dosage, and the cautions and contraindications. In the former edition the authors did not list key characteristics, and I find this additional information very useful. Also, in the former edition, the dosage, the cautions and contraindications were found at the end of each entry and the reader had to search for it since each entry has a different length. Hence this rearrangement was well done by the authors.

Further on the main sections that deal with the clinical use of the herb are the following: actions and indications, commentary, mechanisms of selected combinations, and comparisons are discussed concisely and at great length. An important theme of these sections is the interactions among the herbs. The authors state that in Chinese herbal medicine it is very rare for an herb to be used alone. They describe how the herbs influence one another. They have gone to some length in comparing and contrasting different herbs not only to help the reader understand how to use the herbs in combination, but also to fine-tune one’s understanding of the individual herbs themselves. The authors believe that the variety of historical and contemporary sources cited in these sections will enable readers to fully *grasp* the herbs and thus use them more effectively in the clinic.

The sections for clinical use are followed by traditional contraindications, toxicity, nomenclature and preparation and quality criteria. Every entry is rounded by the discussion and description of major known chemical constituents, adulterants, alternate names and additional product information.

The discussion of the individual herbs is followed by extremely useful tables. In the first table the reader can find herbs associated with pathologies of the five *yin*-organs. To illustrate, *heart-qi-deficiency* can be treated by one or more of the following herbs: Radix Ginseng (Ren shen), Radix Astragali (Huang qi), Radix Glycyrrhizae tosta (Zhi gan cao), Radix Panacis quinquefolii (Xi yang shen), Radix Codonopsis pilosulae (Dang shen), and Arillus Longan (Long yan rou). The second table is a summary table of herb actions and indications. For example Folium Perillae (Zi su ye) disperses *wind-cold*, regulates the *qi*, promotes urination and calms the fetus. Therefore it is indicated to treat exterior *wind-cold*, *spleen-* and *stomach-qi-stagnation* and restless fetus. In the appendices the reader finds a guide to *pinyin* pronunciation, a table of Chinese dynasties, a glossary, sample photographs with adulterants and quality issues, a table of Chinese classic authors, a historical and source text bibliography including the English title, the Chinese title, the *pinyin* title, the author and the date or dynasty, a translator’s bibliography, as well as a cross reference of pharmaceutical names with previous editions. Then there are several indices to be able to actually find everything one is looking for in this wonderful work, a herb and formula index, a *pinyin*-pharmaceutical cross reference, an English-pharmaceutical cross reference, a Japanese- pharmaceutical cross reference, a Korean- pharmaceutical cross reference, a botanical, zoological, and mineral index, and, finally, a general index.

As I mentioned at the beginning I have worked with the former edition of this book for over eight years and have been very content with it, but this new edition has exceeded all my expectations. It is a great reference book for the highly trained professional TCM-practitioner as well as a guide and textbook for less experienced physicians, practitioners, and students of Chinese medicine.

The only disadvantage of this book is its big size and weight, so maybe it is useful to have two of them,

one in the practice and one at home. So I, as a German native speaker, will have a reason to get a German edition as soon as it is out.

Maria Michalitsch

Uwe Siedentopp, Hans-Ulrich Hecker: Praxishandbuch Chinesische Diaetetik Siedentopp, Hecker GbR, Kassel 2004.

Uwe Siedentopp's and Hans-Ulrich Hecker's book is small in size and large in content. It is a well-structured handbook containing a brief theoretical section, the classification of over 250 various foods and a larger practical section.

The theoretical part contains useful information about the basics of Chinese dietetics such as the energetic properties of foods. For example, Siedentopp and Hecker explain the temperature and taste with their certain effects onto the organism as well as the direction of the effect. Furthermore, the authors explain how to change these properties in order to change the medicinal effect on the human body. They discuss the different tastes with their specific effect, mention that some foods possess more than one taste, and explain that the effect does not always correspond to the taste. The contraindications of the different tastes are clearly laid out and very useful for the reader. Though comprehensive, one main contraindication for the bitter taste is not mentioned in the text, that is to say that too much of bitter foods or herbs impair the function of the spleen and may deplete the *spleen-qi* which leads to loose stools, lack of energy or diarrhoea. In practice, one can find this occurring most often in coffee or laxative abusing patients, most of whom are women. The energetic effect of the thermal quality of foods is discussed and examples are given. I can't wholly agree with the authors' claim that cool and cold acting foods nourish the blood since that is true only with a few edibles like mulberry or spinach. The alleged examples, wheat, tomato, banana, yoghurt, black and green tea all do not tone the blood except wheat, and for wheat it is only true when the whole berries are taken and a thick soup (or *congee*) are made with them. Contrary to Chinese herbal drugs, most foods that restore the blood are of warming nature such as chicken, beef, carrots, cherries, longan fruit and apricots.

The theoretical section is followed by a brief description of 254 foods listed in alphabetical order. The foods are categorized by their thermal effect, taste, element, organ, medical effect in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and orthomolecular compound from a Western perspective. To illustrate, Siedentopp and Hecker state that cauliflower is neutral and sweet, associated with the earth-element, affects the spleen, cools *stomach-heat*, harmonizes the "middle" (= *middle burner*), and contains Vitamin C and potassium.

In the following I would like to address some critical comments: There is no obvious reason why the authors discuss the *element (transformation phase)* and the related organ as two separate categories since they are always the same. In their categorisation of particular foods, Siedentopp and Hecker refer only to the *yin-organ*. This would have only made sense if they had differentiated between the *yin-* and *yang-organ* because sometimes only the *yang-organ* within a *transformation phase* is affected by a certain food. Instead of two identical categories I would prefer the description of the main – Western or Chinese – contraindications of some foods such as *phlegm-cold* or rhinitis and sinusitis associated with bananas (important in pediatrics!) or *up-flaring liver-fire* or hypertension and migraine associated with hot and pungent spices like chilli.

Many of the brief food descriptions contain useful information, nevertheless I cannot agree with several as they are contrary to what I have learned and experienced. Take *Melissa officinalis* or balm. Siedentopp and Hecker claim it is neutral, sour, affects the liver and nourishes the *yin* and *fluids*. But *Melissa* is one of the most efficient common Western herbs to treat *stomach-fire* and all its consequences like bleeding gums and toothache as well as *heart-fire* with the symptoms of restlessness and insomnia. This herb is cool, in some literature even described as having a cold effect. Furthermore *Melissa officinalis* resolves *gallbladder-qi-stagnation* and improves blood circulation. So I would have expected

gallbladder, stomach and heart listed as the effected organs by Melissa. Chamomile is also claimed as being neutral by the authors, but it definitely has a cooling effect and therefore cannot soothe stomach pain due to *stomach-cold*. It is only efficient in the treatment of stomach pain due to *heat*. Another example is cornsilk: the authors claim that it is neutral and affects the spleen. Since cornsilk drains *damp-heat* it is often described as cool in TCM-literature, even though such slight differences occur. Nevertheless, cornsilk has a great impact on bladder, gallbladder and liver and is given together with other herbs to treat *yin* or *yang* jaundice as well as gallbladder and bladder stones. Barley is yet another example. Siedentopp and Hecker claim that it is cool because it drains *toxic heat* from the body. But in fact it is the only grain that drains *damp-heat* and also *toxic-heat* (e.g. inflammations) without cooling down the body. Barley can therefore be recommended for long-term use because it does not injure the *spleen-* or *kidney-yang*. There is some discrepancy between the authors' claim and what I have learned as well as experienced with spelt. Spelt is the best grain to nourish *kidney-*, *stomach-* and *heart-yin*, however Siedentopp and Hecker indicate only the spleen and the liver as affected organs. Further on, they do claim that spelt nourishes the *jing* which is the *essence* (= essential body substance that is the source of *yin* and *yang*) stored in the kidney. Chive is claimed to improve digestion by the authors, but it also has an important impact on the *heart-yang* and blood circulation and even can be used as an emergency medical aid in circulatory disturbances like Angina pectoris. And, as a last example, thyme is the main Western herb to dry and dissolve *phlegm-cold* of the lung and heart. Siedentopp and Hecker claim it only affects the spleen.

Many foods again are very well described like carp, duck, rosemary, pole beans or cherries. I suppose 254 different foods are quite a lot and of course there can be quite a few interpretations that differ from one practitioner to the next. There are certainly discrepancies in the classification of certain foods in Chinese medical literature. Nevertheless in such cases I would be grateful to be able to retrace the source of the information whether it was from literature or of own experience. Coffee for example is described in traditional Chinese literature as having a warm or even hot effect on the body (as do Siedentopp and Hecker). However, many Western therapists believe from their own experience that on the one hand it is warm and activates the blood circulation and heart function (though mainly at the expense of *heart-blood* because of its drying effect) on the other hand it has a cooling effect onto the spleen and digestion system. This is why coffee can lead to loose stools and lack of energy in people that suffer from *spleen-qi-deficiency* already. But in such cases authors should declare why they have come to such conclusions because it can help readers interpret and assess the information.

Besides these discrepancies, I found it interesting that the authors differentiate between the effect of herbs/seeds and an infusion of the same herbs and seeds. For example, Siedentopp and Hecker state that fennel (I suppose they talk of the seed, they do not specify) is sweet and acrid, affects the liver, spleen and kidney, harmonizes the "middle", regulates the *qi*, dispels *wind* (this, I've never heard before), warms the kidney, and stops pain. On the other hand, the authors claim that fennel-tea is sweet, affects the spleen and kidney instead of the liver, spleen and kidney, agitates the *qi*, dispels *cold* and warms the *yang*. It is not clear to me why they do differentiate between the tea and the fennel seed and the latter in which kind of preparation? Besides the spleen and kidney, fennel seed *does* affect the liver, it *does not* depend on how one takes it in – as a cooking spice or an infusion of the grounded seeds or a decoction of the whole seeds. In any case it dispels cold from the liver channel and therefore it can be used in the treatment of ovarian or testicular cysts. In addition, cases where the preparation method of the food really does make a difference on its effect on the organism (e.g. baked potatoes strengthen the *qi* versus cooked or mashed potatoes nourish the *yin*, cooked spinach increases the body fluids and advances the intestinal passage whereas baked and well seasoned spinach nourishes the blood) are absent.

Then there could be some misunderstandings concerning the diction. Oat, for example, is described as a means to sink the *qi*. I suppose the authors mean the *stomach-qi* that can lead to nausea when it goes up. Or maybe they mean the *lung-qi*, because oat enhances the communication between the *lung-* and the *kidney-qi*. But they definitely cannot mean the *qi* in general or the *qi* of the *middle burner* since oat acts similar to "*Bu zhong yi qi tang*" – a Chinese formula that lifts up the *qi* in order to treat conditions like prolapse and hypotension.

Despite these discrepancies, the brief descriptions of the foods are clearly laid out and for better visibility and memorability the authors use colours, blue for cold, light blue for cooling, red for hot, light red for warm and grey for neutral foods.

The description of foods is followed by dietetic recommendations according to the main nutritional-relevant disharmony patterns. This section is very well conceived. The reader can find basic disease patterns, for example general lack of *qi*, *yang* and *yin* and general *stagnation* syndromes, as well as particular syndromes that are seen in the affected organs. Both the listing of the symptoms of the basic patterns and the differentiation of symptoms to diagnose the particular pattern is shown succinctly and indicate that Siedentopp and Hecker must be excellent differential diagnosticians. Each discussed pattern/syndrome is rounded by foods and/or eating habits to avoid and furthermore includes certain useful recommendations for patients. The comment for general lack of *qi*, for example, contains the following information: “Preferably regular meals, good breakfasts, and one or two warm meals daily (e.g. soups, stews, casseroles, grain porridge).” Well, I as a nutritional counsellor would be a little more rigorous and recommend two or three warm meals daily to treat a general lack of *qi*, but this handling probably differs from practitioner to practitioner and also from patient to patient. Sometimes the comments are kept too general, as when the authors recommend cucumber, tomato, watermelon, chicory and green tea in the treatment of *blood-heat*. These recommendations are good in case of plethora but not in case of insufficiency. The drying effect of chicory and green tea in case of a *yin-deficiency* that leads to *blood-heat* would be too strong and is therefore then contraindicated. I also cannot agree completely with the food recommendations in the treatment of *lung-yin-deficiency*. In this case the authors recommend pork – because of its *yin*-nourishing effect – and salt – because of its cooling effect. But this syndrome is accompanied by *phlegm-heat* in its chronic form and pork in combination with salt is the number one producer of *phlegm-heat*. On the other hand the recommendations in the treatment of *lung-qi-deficiency*, for example, are overall well chosen.

The authors also list possible Western diagnoses as equivalents to the Chinese patterns. E.g. in the case of *lung-qi-deficiency* they list bronchial asthma, bronchitis, incontinence, susceptibility to infections, food allergy, osteoporosis, rhinitis and sinusitis as possible Western diagnosis. Finding such parallels or equivalents between Western diseases and Chinese disharmony patterns is difficult because they never coincide completely. But Siedentopp and Hecker bypassed this problem in adding a last chapter in their book: Western diagnoses, differentiated according to the main nutrition-relevant TCM-syndromes. In this section the authors discuss particular Western diseases or symptoms and correlate them to Chinese patterns. For example hypertension can be all of the following Chinese patterns: *upflaring liver-yang*, *liver-fire*, *liver-wind*, *liver-yin-deficiency*, *kidney-yin-deficiency*, *phlegm- and dampness-retention*, *qi- and blood-deficiency*. There are a lot of possibilities and the authors did a great job to elaborate this chapter so succinctly and clearly. The discussed Western diagnoses further include eye affections like glaucoma and conjunctivitis, diseases and symptoms of the respiration tract, like bronchial asthma, cough, sore throat, diseases of the intestinal tract like colon irritabile, diarrhoea, gastritis, singultus, affections of the urinary and genital tract like infections, impotence, incontinence, prostatitis, gynaecological affections like amenorrhoea, irregular menstruation, dysmenorrhoea, and also non-specific symptoms like insomnia, headache (they specify nine different types of headache!) and tinnitus are discussed. This section is an exceptional compilation of Western diseases/syndromes and their possible corresponding Chinese patterns.

At the end of the book the reader can find classification tables where foods are organized by different features and criteria like thermal quality, taste, transformation phase, and organs.

Overall, it is clear that the authors are excellent Chinese and Western differential diagnosticians and have a broad knowledge of Chinese dietetics. But, since this handbook also functions as a guide for less experienced physicians, practitioners, and students of Chinese dietetics, I think the particular recommendations should be more precise and the categorisation more accurate. The practitioner with higher training or more experience may be able to fill in gaps and make the necessary connections.

Maria Michalitsch

Publications 2005 of the Unit Ethnomedicine

Binder-Fritz, Christine: Interkulturelle Kompetenz im Gesundheitswesen: Inhalte, Zielsetzungen und Perspektiven von Aus- und Weiterbildungsprogrammen im Pflege- und Medizinbereich. In: Binder, Susanne; Rasuly-Paleczek; Gabriele and Six-Hohenbalken, Maria (ed.) „Heraus Forderung Migration“. Beitrage zur Aktions- und Informationswoche der Universitaet Wien anlaesslich des “UN International Migrant’s Day”: Vienna, 227-239.

Binder-Fritz, Christine: Transkulturelle Perspektiven auf die Wechseljahre: Körperbilder – Körperfragen. In: Journal für Menopause 12, 2: 7-12, (Ausgabe für Österreich); Verlag für Medizin und Wirtschaft, Gablitz.

Binder-Fritz, Christine: Interkulturelle Oeffnung der Altenpflege: Herausforderungen und Chancen für die Zukunft. In: Arias, Ingrid; Horn, Sonja; Hubenstorf, Michael (ed.) In der Versorgung. Vom Versorgungshaus Lainz zum Geriatriezentrum „Am Wienerwald“. Wien, 343-378.

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Prinz, Armin; Kutalek, Ruth: Kulturanthropologische und ethnologische Grundlagen der Medizin. In: Wittmann, Karl (Hrsg.) Der Mensch in Umwelt, Familie und Gesellschaft. Ein Lehr- und Arbeitsbuch für den ersten Studienabschnitt Medizin, 3.aktualisierte Auflage, Facultas Verlag, Wien, 231-246.

Forthcoming Conferences

The **Society for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture**, a new, interdisciplinary scholarly organization, wishes to invite you to membership, and to participate its inaugural Conference, which will be held **6-9 April at the University of Florida**. The mission of the Society is to promote critical, interdisciplinary inquiry into the relationships among human beings and their diverse cultures, environments, and religious beliefs and practices. Over 50 scholars are already planning to attend the conference, including Stephen Kellert, Carolyn Merchant, and Dieter and Ruth Groh. It promises to be an exciting event. One need not be a society member to attend, although there will be a discount for members. Limited travel scholarships are available to assist international scholars from less developed countries. Further information and background about the society is available at www.religionandnature.com/society

Vienna 18. – 21. April 2006 “Annual Meeting of the Transcultural Psychiatry Section of the World Psychiatry Association”. General theme: “Future Directions of Transcultural Psychiatry”.
Info: Prof. Dr. Thomas Stompe und A. Friedmann; Psychiatrische Universitätsklinik Wien, thomas.stompe@chello.at www.tcpwpavienna2006.com
Psychiatric University Clinic Vienna, Waehringer Guertel 18-20
A-1090 Vienna/ AUSTRIA Tel.: +431/40400/3547

Seili, Finland 16 – 18 March 2006, The 4th Biennial Conference of the European Network of Medical Anthropology at Home.
Further Information: <http://www.medanthro.kaapeli.fi>, http://www.agem-ethnomedizin.de/download/DOC-NL5-13-Seili-Finland_2006-2nd_Announc.pdf

Asolimar, CA, USA 12 – 16 April 2006, Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness (SAC) 2006 Spring Meeting at the Asilomar Conference Grounds in Pacific Grove (near Monterey, Ca). Theme: So What? Now What? – Anthropology of Consciousness Responds to a World in Crisis. For more information, visit www.sacaaa.org

Antwerpen (Anvers, Belgium) 25 – 28 June 2006, The 8th annual meeting of the Association for the Scientific Study of Consciousness will be held from June 25th to June 28th, 2004, at the University of Antwerp in Antwerp, Belgium. Information can be found on the conference website (<http://www.ua.ac.be/assc8>). There will also be a separately organized satellite symposium on “Coma and altered states of consciousness” held immediately prior to ASSC8 on June 24th (more information at <http://www.ruca.ua.ac.be/assc8/satellite.!html>).

Nanning, P.R. China 22 – 25 Aug 2006, 9th International Congress of Ethnopharmacology. Info: <http://www.ethnopharmacology.org>. More conferences on Ethnobotany and Ethnopharmacology see: ISE - Newsletter 5,1 – 2005, p. 14 <http://www.ethnopharmacology.org>

Beijing, China 23 – 26 September 2006, 1st World Congress of Cultural Psychiatry of World Association of Cultural Psychiatry <http://www.WACulturalPsychiatry.org>,
<http://www.WACP2006Congress.org>
<http://www.agem-ethnomedizin.de/download/NL6-3-China.pdf>

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Contributing Authors



Hermann Hochegger Born 1931 in Styria, Hermann Hochegger had his first academic formation at the Hochschule of St. Gabriel, Moedling. He was a member of the seminar of cultural anthropology led by Professor Paul Schebesta (1960-1963). After studying French at the University of Grenoble, he received the MA in African sociology and linguistics at the Université de Louvain. His doctoral studies he made at the Sorbonne in Paris, where he was participating in the famous sessions of the Laboratoire d'anthropologie, Collège de France, directed by Claude Lévi-Strauss. In Congo (1963- 1998) he was the founder of CEEBA, an institute of cultural anthropology.



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Photograph last page

This drawing by Mihidi (1983), then a 14 year-old Zande boy, shows a session with the rubbing board oracle *iwa*. The diviner on the left is sitting on a stool. He is wearing ragged clothes and sandals made out of old tyres. This classifies him as a poor village dweller. On the right his client is sitting on a tree trunk. He obviously comes from town because he is dressed in fine clothes and shoes. He must be rich and successful. Nevertheless, when he has a severe problem he has to come back to his home village to consult his old diviner. In the background the white researcher adorned with an expensive watch and wearing Western-style jeans and T-shirt, is sitting on a chair, towering over the other two. He is watching the scene attentively.



Divination, Azande

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