DIVINATION AMONG THE BENA LULUA

BY

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The term *bena*, plural of *mucena* means 'people of', 'belonging to', or 'owners of'. Lulua is the name of the river near which their lands are found; thus they are called the people of the Lulua River. Today they refer to themselves as Bena Lulua or simply Lulua.

The Lulua homeland is found in the Kasai Province in south central Congo. Prior to the inter-tribal wars of 1960 the Bena Lulua occupied most of the territory south of the territory south of the junction of the Kasai and Sankuru rivers, reaching south and east to the Lubi river and west to the Kasai and Lulua rivers. Since the Baluba-Lulua war of 1960, most of the villages near the frontiers have been forced to move nearer the centre of this region, reducing their territory considerably. They now occupy an area of ten to fifteen thousand square miles. The Lulua population consists of approximately five hundred thousand people, of which one fifth of the total number live along the railroad in urban centres. Luluabourg, the capital of the province, has a population of fifty thousand people.

The Bena Lulua are negroid people of medium stature with traces of pygmyoid features resulting from an amalgamation of the Lulua and the Twa, pygmies occupying the territory when the Lulua first arrived. The Lulua are 'shifting-hoe' cultivators and the land is never owned by the planter. The minor and major lineage groups hold the land in trust; the actual title rests with the ancestral spirits.

Divination is not only a basic pattern in understanding the Lulua way of life, but it is also the most important institution in Lulua society. The Lulua diviner is a person with a charismatic call from the ancestors who has been endowed with a particular power (*bukole*) that enables him through the use of oracle (*lubuku*) to reveal the demands of the High God (*Nvidi Mukulu*) and the ancestors to man...
in distress. Every village has at least one if not several diviners who are honored and respected as benefactors in the Lulua society.

Female diviners outnumber their male counterparts roughly six to one. The male ratio would be higher among the neighboring Baluba but still less than the female diviners. A queen or elder diviner (mubuki mukulu) presides over all female diviners in every cluster of villages or "groupment." She also is able to find and interpret the spell (mukiya) that "catches" another diviner; she not only directs the initiation rites but also delivers instructions concerning the oracle (lubuku) to the novice. Male diviners function under the direction of an elder (mubuki mukulu). As the position is not always hereditary, it is obtained by possessing an outstanding reputation as a diviner and sufficient funds to influence the reigning leader to bequeath it to a seeking aspirant. The male elder enjoys greater socio-political prestige than does the female, for when a major disaster strikes a community, the male elder is invariably entrusted with the task of determining the responsible agent.

The primary function of the diviner is to discover who has caused life's deviations and to recommend the appropriate specialist who can deal with it. Since the Lulua are not primarily concerned with why it happened but with who caused it to happen, they ask the diviner: "Was it Nvidi Mukulu (the Creator God), or nkambua (ancestors), or baloji (witches), or was it man and buanga (magic and medicines)?" Minor ailments are attributed to sorcery and malevolent ancestral spirits, but major sickness in which death is imminent is said to be caused by witches. Someone, finite or infinite, is the causal agent, for no event occurs by natural cause in the Lulua world view. If a dog were killed by a car, it would be acknowledged that the car killed the dog, but who caused the dog to be in that particular place at that specific instant? They fear not the car, but the super-normal causative agent that brought the dog and the car to the same spot resulting in misfortune.

Depending on the nature of the problem, the diviner may direct a suffering individual to a medicine man, a priest or perhaps the vomitor or poisoner. Whenever the Lulua feels that his muntu (man-ness) is threatened in a way he cannot diagnose and treat empirically he turns to the diviner who searches for the wisdom that is concealed in the realm of the hantu (cosmic world). Once the knowledge has been obtained the diviner directs the muntu (man) to the specialist, generally the medicine man, who has obtained occult knowledge of