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# THE SOUTHERN WORKMAN

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**T**HE best cultural values are gained, not when we escape from industry, but when we make it express our highest purpose.

—ARTHUR MORGAN

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Press of  
The Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute  
Hampton, Virginia

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# The Southern Workman

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## EDITORIALS

**Southern Home-Economics Association** The Southern Home-Economics Association met at Nashville, Tennessee, June 9 to 11. The Association meetings were held at the George Peabody College and were attended by supervisors and teachers of home economics from all the Southern States. Miss Lyford of Hampton Institute presented a paper on "The Home-Economics Education of the Negro Girl" in which she included a report of the industrial work carried on by the Jeanes industrial teachers in the rural schools and of the high-school classes, the teacher-training classes, and the continuation classes supported in part by the Federal Board for Vocational Education and in part by the fourteen Southern States. Miss Lyford's report of the State work was supplemented by a report of work in the colored schools of a well-organized county given by Miss Charl Williams, county superintendent of Shelby County, Tennessee. These reports indicated clearly the progress that is possible where policies are clearly outlined and their continuation is assured through organization.

During the sessions of the Conference the State Supervisors of Home Economics were invited to visit the Agricultural and Industrial-Normal School and a delicious luncheon was served to them by its home-economics department. Summer School was in progress and the Normal School was apparently taxed to its capacity.

In addition to the Tennessee teachers large numbers of vocational students are attending the Normal School, availing themselves of the courses offered to wounded soldiers by the Federal Board.

# AFRICAN HANDICRAFTS AND SUPERSTITIONS\*

BY WILLIAM H. SHEPPARD

William H. Sheppard, D.D. was a missionary in the Belgian Congo under the Presbyterian Church South for twenty years, where he was a fearless fighter for human rights, exposing, at the risk of his life, the Belgian atrocities against the helpless Africans. Left alone in the heart of Africa by the death of his white friend and co-worker, the Rev. Samuel N. Lapsley, Dr. Sheppard penetrated to the hitherto forbidden country of King Lukenga, and at another time came into contact with the cannibal tribe called Zap-po-Zaps. In recognition of his discoveries he was made a Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society of England.

Born in 1865 he came to Hampton in the early 80's, getting at the Institute through Dr. H. B. Frissell his inspiration for missionary work. He obtained his theological training at Stillman Institute, Alabama, and though he returned from Africa in broken health, is now a preacher and indefatigable Sunday-school worker in Louisville, Kentucky.

—The Editors



THE natives of Africa have a decided taste for the beautiful. They decorate everything. Sometimes it takes them a year to hew out a canoe from an enormous tree in the forest, miles from a river. When it is in good shape and sand-papered (a rough bark being used for polishing) they take a chalky substance (*lupemba*) trace a design, and proceed with a small adz and knife to carve the design. They then polish the canoe again with the rough bark. The last process is rubbing with oil and palm-fibre.

In building their houses they use smooth poles for the framework. Split bamboo is tied on the sides and roof; then palm leaves, which have previously been sewed together, making matting, are placed over the frame of the house and tied on with strong cords. From two to any number of men work together. The cords are so tied that when the house is finished

\*This article includes a description of the remarkable African exhibit in the Blake Museum at Hampton Institute, which was collected chiefly by the author.

the sides exhibit a distinct and beautiful design. Many times the bamboo which holds the smooth matting in position is colored—red, yellow, or black. The door jambs are made of very thick boards, carved with artistic designs.

In King Lukenga's country (the home of the great Bakuba tribe) every house has a high fence around it made of tall smooth poles, palm-leaf matting, and layers of split bamboo. The strong cord which fastens the bamboo to the frame work is, as usual, so tied as to form designs.

The bed frames inside the houses are thick pieces of hard timber. These are also carved into figures. Their clay pots for cooking and the large water pots are decorated, and knives as well as spears are carved.

Their baskets, which are carried on the head and not on the arm, are narrow and from three to four feet long. These baskets are woven in figures on both sides. They are made of thin pieces of bamboo interwoven with strong cords. The natives have many kinds of baskets. Some are used for bringing corn, sweet potatoes, yams, peanuts, and other products from the fields. Some are made in basket style and hold water; others are nearly flat and are used for plates. They are all made in different designs.

Even their hoes, which are their principal farming implements, all have patterns made by the blacksmiths on both handle and blade. The ore from which these hoes are made is gathered mostly from the surface of the hills, smelted in crude ovens, and beaten into shape by the village blacksmith. They insert the iron point into a knot on the handle of the hoe and not the handle into the hoe. In this way the hoe is easily pulled out of the handle and an adz inserted for other kinds of work. So a man need have but one handle for many tools. The native digs up the ground where the corn, for example, is to be planted, throws in the seed, and covers it with his big toe. Hundreds of acres of corn, tobacco, peas, beans, cassava, sugar cane, and peanuts are planted in this way and cultivated with the hoe.

On my first visit into the "Forbidden Land" of King Lukenga I suffered many disappointments and privations. After many weeks and months on the trail and off the trail, as I penetrated farther and farther inland, the natives became more and more excited. At last the King felt that I was approaching too near to his seat of government, so he sent down his special fighters. I was halted and my whole caravan was put under arrest. The village in which I was found was condemned by the King's guard. I pled in their tongue (which I had picked up from

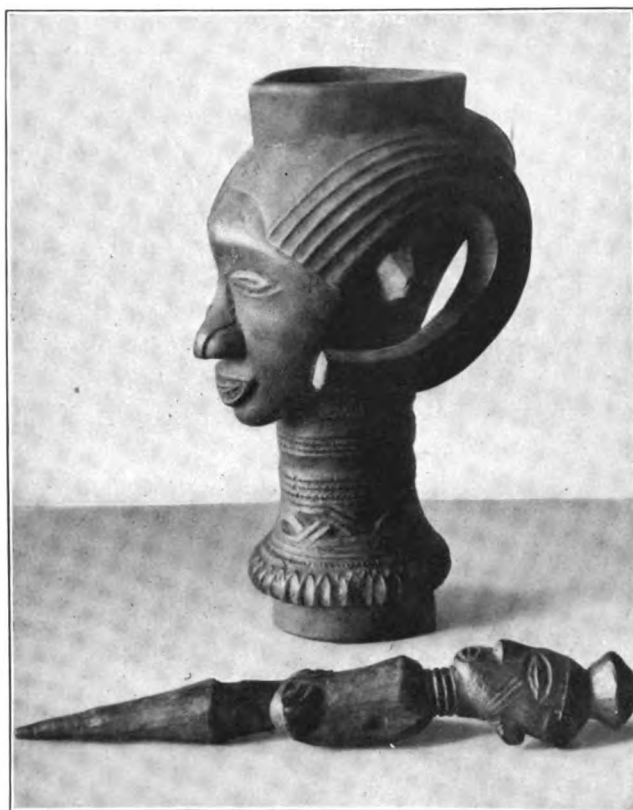


FIG. 1—ONE OF KING LUKENGA'S CUPS  
The "Bakuba Sentry" in the foreground

some of the King's traders in our region) for their lives and mine. They were astonished to find a foreigner speaking their language. The matter was communicated to the King at the capital. He had his soothsayers and witch-doctors find out from the spirits who I was. Their superstition turned things in my favor, for I was, so they said, a dead son of King Lukenga. In great excitement they told the King I had been born again and was now trying to find my way back home. I was carried in great honor the rest of the journey, a feast day was appointed, and I was received publicly by King Lukenga. I made many denials of their idea, but it was useless.

During my stay with the King he presented me with royal cups, a royal sceptre, and a royal knife. The illustration (Fig. 1) shows one of King Lukenga's cups. His servant kneels before His Highness, holding the cup with both hands. The servant takes a sip of the contents (palm wine), then presents it to the King, and finally claps his hands three times in honor of His Majesty. The cup is made of mahogany and the face on it seems

to verify their tradition that many, many years ago they came from a far-away land (Egypt?), traveled and camped, traveled and camped, crossed rivers, fought with many tribes, and at last settled on a great plateau. They started out to conquer the tribes in the Kassai Valley, and succeeded; to-day Lukenga is the acknowledged King of all this region.

In the same illustration with the royal cup is an object of special interest called the "Bakuba sentry." This is driven into the ground in front of a man's house while he is busy outside his door under a shed or porch spinning balls of twine from palm fibre, out of which he will weave seines for fishing; or he may be weaving cloth or mats, making hats, or carving. The sentry watches carefully and no enemy can approach or evil spirit come near without the workman's knowledge.



FIG. 2—BAKUBA CUPS

The natives drink water and palm wine, their only beverages, from cups of various shapes made of mahogany or ebony and elaborately carved as shown in Fig. 2. The cups in the Hampton Institute exhibit were collected by the writer in the interior of Central Africa, twelve hundred miles from the West Coast. When a man is traveling on the caravan road or visiting his friends he always uses his own cup which he carries tied to the waist by a thick cord.

The pipes of the Bakuba people (Fig. 3) are almost sacred, many of them being blessed by the witch-doctors. Those so blessed are smoked by the owner only. If the smoker in traveling gets tobacco from a village and some enemy wishes the smoker harm through the tobacco, the wish is made useless



FIG. 3—BAKUBA PIPES

because of the witch-doctor's blessing. Other pipes can be borrowed from a villager but the smoker carries in his pouch a small charm which he licks with his lips before using, as that destroys any ill wish of the lender; and the charm (being a charm) prevents the contraction of any disease by touching it with the lips!

Some pipe bowls are made from very hard wood and are left to the son as a legacy. The son is proud of his father's pipe. The traveler sticks his pipe stem through his belt, bowl upwards.



FIG. 4—ZAP-PO-ZAP IDOL AND HEAD-REST AND A BAKETTI PIPE

The Bakuba smoke tobacco only. Fields of it are raised by the Bakuba and bartered or sold. They do not remember when they did not have tobacco. The cannibals ("Zap-po-Zaps") smoke hemp. The Bakuba women never smoke; the Zap-po-Zap women do. The pipes of this cannibal tribe were made after the Catholic priest came into their country, and are cut to represent such a priest riding an ox. The oxen are brought in from the Portuguese country in the far south. Notice the long beard and the boots of the priest in the pipe shown at the beginning of this article. Fashioned after the image of a Catholic priest with a long beard is also the Zap-po-Zap idol in Fig. 4. Most of the priests in the Congo wear long beards and teach the natives that men with long beards are superior to others; and so the Zap-po-Zap has changed his idol's appearance to give it this superiority.

At the right of the idol may be seen a head-rest used by the Zap-po-Zaps. I cannot say why the feet are like those of an animal, unless they are meant for lion's feet to give them strength while they sleep. There are lions in their country and all of these carvings mean something. I know men and women who sleep with strands of an elephant's tail around their necks because they believe it imparts strength to them while they are asleep.

In Fig. 4 is shown also a Baketti pipe, which resembles the pipes of the Bakuba. The mouth-pieces of the two are alike, this one being the leg of a monkey. The Baketti, like the Bakuba, smoke only tobacco; these tribes are neighbors and are under the reign of King Lukenga.

Possibly the most interesting of the objects in the Hampton collection pictured in this article is the witch-doctor's test-board, shown in Fig. 5. The board is made in the image of a crocodile and is used only by the witch-doctors. There are six or eight of these doctors in every village. From their point of view no one dies a natural death, so the person accused of being a witch and causing a death is tried by the witch-doctor. Holding the test-board the accused kneels and bows before the witch-doctor, who proceeds with three fingers to move the button from the tail of the crocodile towards the head. If the button refuses to slide the witch-doctor tries it three times, and if the button does not reach the shoulders of the crocodile the person is counted guilty of witchcraft.

The condemned sits from one to three days in the house made for that purpose and always on the most prominent street, to receive the visits and expressions of encouragement or condemnation of friends or enemies. The supreme test comes when



the victim, followed by hundreds of villagers, is led by the witch-doctor out of the town to a large plain. Bark is scraped from a poisonous tree, pounded in the presence of the excited people, mixed with water, poured into a cup or bowl, and then the witch-doctor calls to the people for silence. He says to the condemned that if he is surely guilty he will die when he takes the poison; if not guilty he will vomit it. The accused never refuses to drink the poison and he seldom remains to tell the tale of innocence or guilt. The victim, after drinking the poison, is chased over the field by his enemies until he reels and falls. Any life remaining is crushed out by the witch-doctor; the body is borne by friends to a pile of dry wood and brush and placed upon it. Palm oil is poured on freely, then a torch is applied, and



FIG. 5—WITCH-DOCTOR'S TEST BOARD  
Native African work boxes in the foreground

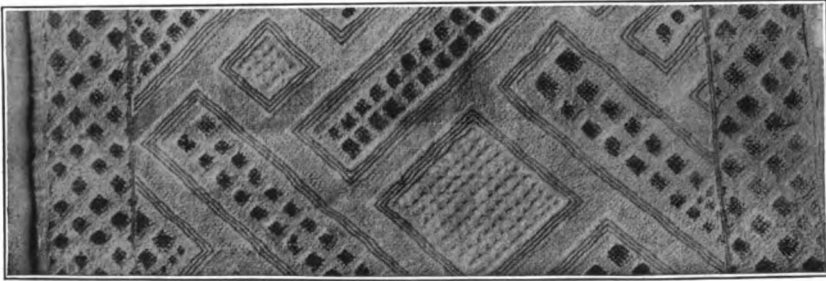
the body of the victim is burned. The fire, they believe, destroys both body and spirit and the person cannot come back again.

The work-boxes shown in Fig. 5 are used by the women, who place their working implements in them. They are carved by the town artist who makes his livelihood by this work. The carving is done with a crude, simple knife made by the town blacksmith.

The very remarkable cloth made by the Bakuba people has as its foundation the fibre of a palm tree. The long leaves are broken off and the heart of the leaves torn out; they are then combed into shreds or strings and woven into form by a handloom. This foundation is then worked in designs with a needle and palm thread, a small, sharp knife being used to clip off the

tufts. They do not mark the design but keep the pattern in their heads.

The threads are either of the natural color or dyed. If they are to be red they are dipped into cam-wood powder, which is the root of a certain tree beaten into power, mixed with water, and boiled. If the thread is to be black it is dipped into a mixture of water and the dross from pulverized iron ore, which has been boiled. If they wish yellow threads they get the root of a certain shrub, dry it, beat it to a powder, boil in a pot, dip the threads and dry them. Their designs and ideas are many. There is one which they call *N'jessent* (lightning), another *tooln* (a snake), which looks like a rattlesnake. These beautiful snakes are common. Another design represents the sides and ends of their houses, called *Mbula*. Still another they call *N'co* (leopard's skin). Again, some designs are like what we would call a checker board. They have games like checkers which they play on boards or on the ground. As I observed them for twenty years they always took their designs and ideas from something around them.



CLOTH MADE BY THE BAKUBA TRIBE