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THE SOUTHERN ANTHROPOLOGIST



Winter 1986

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LETTER

Dear SAS Member:

The 1986 Preliminary Program is printed in this issue of The Southern Anthropologist and so is the second half of Jean Allan's witchcraft paper. Please note the correct spelling of Jean's name: ALLAN. If you would like a complete copy of the spring program and abstracts and are unable to attend the meetings, copies will be available after the April meetings. Write or phone and I shall be happy to mail you a copy.

Patricia B. Lerch, Editor

CONVENTION NOTES

A brief meeting update was mailed to all convention participants in February. Please note that on Saturday evening, April 26th, a "shrimparoo" will be sponsored by the SAS-AES-SMA for meeting participants and guests. The cost will be \$20.67 per adult and \$8.50 per child. The menu features steamed clams, shrimp, crabs, fried oysters, hush puppies, potatoe salad, corn on the cob, green beans, a fresh fruit salad, and tea or coffee. If you wish to reserve a place for this buffet supper, please send a check for the total amount by April 17th to P.B. Lerch, Dept of Soc/Anthro, UNCW, Wilmington, N.C. 28403. Checks should be made payable to The Southern Anthropological Society.

As a special event, the UNCW Black Gospel Choir, an all student organization, will perform on Thursday evening at the Blockade Runner Hotel. There is no admission for this event. On Friday evening, Professor Rodney Needham (Oxford Univ) will present the keynote address on a topic relating to features of human thought.

Hotel reservation information was published in the Fall issue (1985, Volume 13) of The Southern Anthropologist.

PRELIMINARY PROGRAM

**Annual Meeting of the Southern Anthropological Society
held in conjunction with the
106th Annual Meeting of the American Ethnological Society
and the Society for Medical Anthropology
April 24th-27th**

Thursday Morning April 24th

1. Prehistoric Coastal Archaeology (SAS Invited Session)
2. Symbolism and Symbolic Systems (SAS Volunteered Papers)
3. Social Science and Coastal Resource Management: the Fisheries of North Carolina (SAS Invited Session)
4. Contested Domains of Reproduction, Sexuality, Family, and Gender in America (AES Invited Session)
5. Health Programs and Policies for Prenatal Care, Childbirth, and Family Planning (AES)

Thursday Afternoon, April 24th

6. Kin and Nonkin Networks (SAS Volunteered Papers)
7. Anthropological Theory (SAS Volunteered Papers)
8. Social Science and Coastal Resource Management: the Fisheries of North Carolina II (SAS Invited Session)
9. Knowledge and Power in the Management of Reproduction (SMA Invited Session)
10. Strategies for Reproductive Success in Human Societies (AES)

Thursday Evening April 24th

UNCW Black Gospel Choir

Friday Morning April 25th

11. Cultural Adaptations on the Southern Coastal Plain (SAS Key Symposium) I
12. Medical Anthropology (SAS Volunteered Papers)
13. Subcultural Groups in the South (SAS Volunteered Papers)
14. Applying Cultural Analysis to the Political Dynamics of Reproduction (AES Invited Session)
15. Questioning the Natural: Lila Liebowitz's Contribution to a Unified Bio-social Anthropology (Memorial Session for Lila Liebowitz)

**SAS BOARD MEETING LUNCH MEETING

Friday Afternoon April 25th

16. Cultural Adaptations on the Southern Coastal Plain (SAS Key Symposium) II
17. Doing Anthropology in Non-traditional Settings (SAS Organized Session)
18. Anthropology and Business (SAS Volunteered Papers)
19. La Operacion (Film-AES)
20. Race, Class, Ethnicity and Reproduction in Urban America (AES Invited Session)
21. Ideologies of Reproduction (AES)

Friday Evening April 25th

AES BOARD OF DIRECTORS (6:00 - 8:00)

Keynote Address: Professor Rodney Needham (8:00)

Saturday Morning April 26th

22. Contemporary Southeastern Indians (SAS Invited Session) I
23. Folklore of the South and of Coastal Environments (SAS Invited Session)
24. Family Planning Policies and Programs and the Third World (SMA Invited Session)
25. Issues in the Control of the Reproductive Cycle (AES)
26. Reproduction: A Challenge for Feminist Analysis (AES)

Saturday Afternoon April 26th

27. Contemporary Southeastern Indians (SAS Invited Session) II
28. Ethnographic Methods (SAS Volunteered Papers)
29. Rehabilitative Medicine in the USSR
30. ROUNDTABLE--FIELD SCHOOLS
31. The Politics of Reproduction: Case Studies Reflecting on the Work of Mary O'Brien (AES Invited Session)
32. Folklore of the Procreative Process (SMA Invited Session)

Saturday Evening April 26th

Shrimparoo

Sunday Morning April 27th

33. Life Histories and Cultural Models (SAS Organized Session)
34. VIDEOTAPE SESSION
35. Fertility and Its Context: Biology, Culture, Economy (SMA Invited Session)
36. Reproduction, Social Organization and Economy (AES)

1985 WINNER OF STUDENT PAPER COMPETITION

CHOCTAW WITCHCRAFT:
A SYNTHESIS OF THE ETHNOHISTORIC ACCOUNTS II
Jean Allan
University of Alabama
Paper Submitted for Student Paper Competition
Southern Anthropological Society Meetings
Fayetteville, Arkansas
April 10-13, 1985

Abstract

"Belief in witches, which seems to have been an overshadowing horror to so many people, was equally rampant among the Choctaw" (Swanton 1931:129). Although there is little doubt of the existence of witch beliefs and their persistence within this Southeastern Indian group, documentation of the subject is severely limited. This paper reviews available sources with a consideration of their restrictions. As with most groups who conceive of witches, there is the logical assumption that witchcraft is involved only in events that cannot be accounted for through obvious explanations.

Ball Game Witches

Witches, traditionally unpopular in Choctaw society, were condoned in the sports arena. Everyone felt that each community had at least one witch. In a contest between communities the witch's loyalties lay with his or her group and the witch's services were necessary to keep the opposing group's witch(es) in check. If the other team's witch put a curse on an outstanding player, his team's witch would retaliate in kind. The normally dangerous, forbidding, and secretive behavior of witches in this setting becomes not only public knowledge but an acceptable and patriotic business (Blanchard 1980:89-90).

Swanton's informant, Simpson Tubby, told him: "They [witches] were accepted at ball games because there they had to fight other wizards but not at other times officially." But Swanton (1931:240) refutes this statement because it seemed unlikely to him, "that in ancient times one who had such a reputation would have been given a position of such importance."

Today, witchcraft might be involved in any sports activity. In times past, ishtaboli, more commonly recognized as stickball, the two racket game, or lacrosse, was the principal sport and ritual activity of the Choctaw. In a classic game, one local group competed against another and the match included a wide range of ceremonial and festive events. Each localities' ritual specialists were involved in this competition (Blanchard 1980:84). Doctors treated the limbs of players to make them invincible. Rainmakers brought showers to prevent imminent defeat or otherwise effect game outcome. Drummers and chanters lead community members in magically beneficial songs and dances. And witches invoked power to give added strength to their team members and cast spells on opponents to hinder their performance" (Blanchard 1980:84).

In her monograph on Choctaw music, Densmore describes ball game ritual. Densmore notes that the sound of whistles played by medicine men during a game was referred to as "the noise made by the witches." She remarks on the topic of ball game witchcraft: "During a game, the medicine men take turns in standing near the goal posts of their respective teams, to prevent the approach of the opposing medicine men who, it is believed, will cause disaster by means of evil magic" (Densmore 1943:128-129).

Blanchard (1981:156) claims that Densmore's description of "medicine men" actually cover several categories of ritual specialists including witches. He says the main ritualistic roles of the past have now been narrowed to include only the doctor and witch. Today, Choctaws generally agree that the doctor administers medicine, uses fairly standardized techniques, and is usually benevolent as opposed to the witch who is evil in nature. Both are believed useful in the sports environment. They function as the cause and/or post game rationalization of the final score (Blanchard 1980:86).

The witch is employed in ball games to put curses on individual players, to hex equipment, and to otherwise magically affect game results. According to Blanchard:

If one is willing to take the chance and risk possible community disapproval and victim reprisal, he or she can very easily enlist the help of an appropriate specialist to "fix the game" or "hurt" a key player on the opposing team. Within each local group

there are still witch doctors who for a fee, usually commensurate with their reputed power, can bring about the desired results, in many cases appealing to the bohpoli for help (Blanchard 1981:160).

Supernatural assistance is most often required if the game is a critical one such as a tournament or league championship or if the opposing team possesses superior talent (Blanchard 1980:88).

For a fee, a doctor may be engaged to "fix" an athlete's body. For example, a softball pitcher might have his arm treated to make his pitches unhittable. This may involve magic principles but can also be a therapeutic treatment or an externally applied pharmaceutical. If an injury is incurred during an athletic contest, the doctor may apply the "horn." It is also the doctor's job to prepare amulets or fetishes to protect the player against the other team's magic. The use of medicine is considered a necessary part of the sport experience, although some players question the ethics of the "fix." Combatants appealed to the extraordinary only in those areas where skill alone was insufficient to achieve desired ends (Blanchard 1980:86-87).

Even though witches are consulted by athletes, they are still viewed in a negative light. A witch must retain some sort of anonymity while concurrently building up power and reputation at the expense of others. A person believed to be a witch is generally despised. Respect for the witch's power keeps people from venting their hate openly (Blanchard 1980:87).

Identifying a Witch

Definite connections between witches and doctors have been established, the witch being perceived as a bad doctor. Doctors who have become witches are careful not to let people know it. Paradoxically, they must gain a powerful reputation in order to establish a sizable clientele. This conflict is reflected in the attitude of many Choctaw who claim not to know the witches in their particular community but who know where to go if they need the kind of help a witch has to offer (Blanchard 1981:155).

Sepulvado's informant, Dr. "John", said that as a result of numerous witchcraft discussions throughout the reservation, everybody is suspect when it comes to identifying witches (Sepulvado 1983:108).

Doctors, and one presumes witches, are supposed to exhibit early signs of their future vocation. As children they may behave eccentrically, spending a great deal of time in the woods and staying out at night. One of Blanchard's informants describes this behavior:

They say that you can tell when a kid's little if he's going to be a medicine man. He usually likes to go into the woods by himself and stay for a long time. He might go out at night a lot. Sometimes he will walk in his sleep and go out in the woods. That's where it [the revelation that he is destined to be a doctor] happens. He can go there and be gone for a long time, but come back. If he wakes up when he's out there, he can't find his way back. Also, he'll get sick if he wakes up. (Blanchard 1981:150).

It is during these nocturnal wanderings that the future doctor encounters the little men. As an adult, the doctor often has an impoverished appearance demonstrating his rejection of material values (Blanchard 1981:150).

Although one may manifest the symptoms of occult power when young witches are most often recognized as old people. According to Bushnell:

Witchcraft (holkkunda) was practised by many persons, both men and women. It was never definitely known whether a person possessed the power to bewitch or when one was making use of it. Old people of both sexes, however, were most often suspected of possessing this power (Bushnell 1909:29).

In Southeastern Indian society, old people are accorded respect and power. Specific reasons for a preponderance of old witches are not mentioned in Choctaw accounts. Possibly, the explanation parallels the Cherokee and Seminole belief. Cherokee witches add the unexpired life expectancies of their victims to their own (Mooney and Olbrechts 1932: 30). Seminole witches add two to three years per victim to their own life span (Howard 1984:97). With advancing age, one becomes an increasingly more likely candidate for a witch accusation. One might begin displaying occult tendencies as a child, but unusual longevity makes one's status as a witch apparent.

Elderly people are charged with witchcraft in many societies. In Europe this emerges as part of the "low risk" group including beggars, cripples, widows, and orphans, along with the very old (Henningsen 1980: 12). All these people have few defenses and make convenient scapegoats. In a kin based society persons with few relations are the most vulnerable as Edwards explains:

If the patient dies, the doctor proceeds to tell who is the witch that caused the sickness and death. He generally selects some lone woman, who has scarce any near kindred to avenge her death. The friends of the deceased then watch their opportunity to kill her (Edwards 1932:416).

Viewed from this perspective the witch seems to have little prestige.

Conversely, witches are often envisaged as powerful people. Even clergymen can be witches. McCurtain describes an accusation of witchcraft against an Oklahoma Choctaw Presbyterian minister (Swanton 1928c: 270-271). A native preacher of a Protestant church in Mississippi is reputed to be a witch. Several Choctaws described this witch to Blanchard. One person claimed to have seen him riding above the ground in an invisible automobile. Howard describes a Seminole deacon stikini or man-owl, who put women magically to sleep in order to have sexual relations with them (Howard 1984:101). Choctaws do not discern a religious conflict of interest in the dual role of the witch/minister (Blanchard 1981:154).

Victims of Witchcraft

Witches initiated their skill by attacking their immediate family and neighbors. Though their malice might cause them to injure other personal contacts through spite, many of their evil deeds were carried out at the

behest of clients. The witch confers the positive benefit of being able to harm the client's enemy for a fee (Debo 1972:7). A witch's abilities could be used to correct a social injustice, though the ethics of such practice might be questioned. Most people, however, fall victim to witchcraft through no fault of their own.

Individuals with celebrated talents are always in danger of being the target of witchcraft. Notable local athletes are often under attack, many times for reasons unrelated to their athletic activities (Blanchard 1981:159).

McCurtain said bewitching human beings was less difficult than bewitching cattle. Old people and children were considered easier prey than others (Swanton 1928c:272).

Cherokee witches preferred attacking people who were seriously ill or otherwise enfeebled. These individuals succumbed more readily to occult powers than did healthy and robust people (Mooney and Olbrechts 1932:74). Women in labor and young infants were also likely victims (Hudson 1978: 179). The Choctaw witch's preference for healthy babies' blood has been noted (Blanchard 1981:154).

Anti-Witch Rites

When one has fallen victim to a witch, another witch or doctor can be engaged to retaliate. The decision to do this is risky because the witch's power may be greater than his combatent's. If, however, the witch loses the power struggle, his own medicine will "boomerang" and he may suffer the fate he intended for his victim.

Preventative measures may prove efficacious in the face of a witch attack. Medicine, amulets or charms, and spells can be used to counteract the effects of witchcraft. Alternatively one might "buy the witch off" to encourage him to cease his attentions (Swanton 1928c:171).

The doctor is very reticent about his witchcraft cures. Sepulvado's informant Dr. "Bill" claims it is too dangerous to discuss specific treatments against witchcraft or to have it known publicly that he is knowledgeable in this area (Sepulvado 1983:113).

In situations where a death is diagnosed as the result of witchcraft, some Choctaw doctors maintain they can revive the recently deceased. Of course, this is only possible if the doctor is called in time (Blanchard 1981:150).

Amulets or charms, usually prescribed by doctors, are often used by Choctaw ball players against enemy magic (Blanchard 1980:87, 1981:162). One of Blanchard's informants supplies a recipe for one such charm:

. . . get a dried, hot pepper, put some salt or pepper on it, and sew it up in a piece of cloth--a red cloth is best--and put it in our back pocket. We would also rub it on our gloves during the warm-up before the game. . . . It kept the other team's power from working (Blanchard 1981:163).

Witches compete with fellow occult specialists, their greatest rivals. McCurtain mentions the doctor's practice of continually taking special medicine to circumvent the devices of witches (Swanton 1928c: 271).

Hitchcock documents a Creek procedure for thwarting witches. He says, "Formerly the Indians have knocked old women regarded as witches on the head and threw them in the water, but now there is a law against it . . ." (Foreman 1930:140). That the Choctaw had a similar practice is verified by Christian. She discusses a doctor's treatment of a sick man. As she relates, "The man died and they blamed sister for his death. If the guards had caught her they would have stripped her clothing off and dipped her under cold water, thereby dispelling the evil spirit" (Christian 1931:162).

The ultimate anti-witch procedure is to destroy the witch himself. If the witch has shapeshifted, the metamorphosed animal or the witch's entrails can be damaged. Alternatively, the human body of the witch can be killed. Collin said:

Frequently, the bereaved relatives killed the accused. They believed that the illness was caused by an evil spirit, and that it was important to drive away the spirit by killing the person whose body housed the spirit. Sometimes ceremonies were used to determine the offending witch and occasionally the alichi merely accused someone. Often dances were used to drive out evil spirits (Allen 1970:63-64).

Executions

Executions of witches occurred but these people were destroyed not because it was believed they had supernatural powers, but because they used their powers to kill or seriously injure someone. Therefore they were punished for being a murderer not for being a witch (Swanton 1928a: 345-346).

Murder through the use of witchcraft was regarded with more horror than ordinary homicide because of the uncanny nature of the offense and the underground methods involved (Swanton 1931:110, Debo 1972:22). Even though the witch resembled a human being, his evil nature placed him outside the human realm (Hudson 1978:182, Fogelson 1975:119).

McCurtain notes the caution taken in assigning guilt to those people believed to possess supernatural powers. He says:

These wizards, conjurers, doctors, etc., were watched closely all the time and if they did not boast overmuch they were left alone; but if they became too boastful they were killed, but not until people felt sure that they were doing wrong (Swanton 1928c:271).

Methods of executing people for witchcraft included knocking the head with an ax, shooting with a rifle, or, in the following accounts, burning to death. Burning at the stake was not a fate reserved specifically for witches. Prisoners of war sometimes met their death in this manner. A slave woman owned by a Choctaw was burned to death in 1859, accused of instigating the

murder of her master (McLoughlin 1974:113). This method of execution may have been appointed for people involved in particularly heinous crimes.

Documenting the allegedly homicidal habits of witches and the penalties for these crimes are the following accounts:

In 1731 DuRoulet records that the Choctaw believed the English and Chickasaw had killed many of their people "by means of a medicine which they had spread among them" (Swanton 1931: 239).

In 1742 "the chief of the Mobiliens (a small tribe closely related to the Choctaw) had two of the warriors of his village killed, one of them a medicine man who had treated a Choctaw who had afterward died. An accusation of sorcery was given as the reason for sacrificing them" (Swanton 1931:239).

Bossu reports:

The Choctaws believe in the existence of sorcerers and witches. When they think that they have discovered one, they bash in his head without any kind of trial.

. . .In 1752, when I was in Mobile, I saw an Indian killed with an ax because he said he was a sorcerer. The Indians blamed him for the tribe's bad luck (Feiler 1962:168).

Cushman recites the following case history of a witch execution that took place in 1819:

A Choctaw girl, who lived about thirty miles distant, came, a short time before Mr. Kingsbury arrived, to visit some friends living near where Eliot was located. The girl was taken sick, and an old Choctaw woman--a conjuring doctress--proposed to cure her. She was at once employed in the case. After giving her patient a variety of root and herb decoctions, internally and also externally applied for several days. At the same time chanting her incantations and going through her wild ceremonies over and around her patient, she pronounced the girl convelescent and would recover; the father was informed of the happy change, and came to take his daughter home; he remunerated the apparently successful physician by giving her a pony, and retired for the night intending to start for home with his daughter the next day; but during the night, the daughter suddenly became worse and expired in 24 hours. It was at once decided that her sudden demise was the result of a isht-ul-bih (witch ball) shot from an invisible rifle in the hands of a witch. Without delay her physician was consulted, who pronounced Illichih to be the witch who had shot the fatal bullet. Immediately the father with several other men, all armed, went to the home of Illi-chih and entered her cabin. She displayed her hospitality, so universal among all Indians, by setting before them the best she had; and after they had partaken of her scanty refreshments, the father suddenly sprang to his feet and, seizing her by the hair, cried out "Huch-ish-no fiopa uno chumpa; aholh-kun-na chish-o yokut, cha ish ai illih, (your life I bought; a witch you are, and must die)". To which Illichih, realizing her inevitable doom, calmly replied: "Chomi holu-bih, Cha ish moma yimmih (others lie,

and you all believe)." In a moment she was stretched upon the floor a bleeding corpse (Cushman 1899:137-138).⁶

Sometime during May 1820, Adam Hodgson, an English visitor to Choctaw territory, witnessed fifty or sixty Choctaws assembled in the woods to avenge the death of a woman who had been killed as a witch (Hodgson 1824:215).

In 1829 the Choctaw passed a law giving a person accused of witchcraft the benefit of a trial. The law reads as follows:

Council House, September 18, 1829.

Whereas, it has been an old custom of the Choctaws to punish persons said to be wizzards or witches with death, without giving them any fair trial by any disinterested persons; and many have fallen victims under the influence of this habit--

We do hereby resolve; in general council of the north, east, and southern districts, that, in future, all persons who shall be accused of being a wizzard or witch, shall be tried before the chiefs and committees, or by any four captains; and if they be found guilty, they shall be punished at the discretion of the court.

Be it further resolved, that if any person or persons shall find at any place the entrails of a wizzard or witch, the said entrails going from or returning to the body, the said body shall be put to death at the place where it may be discovered, and the said body shall be cut open, by a proper person, and an examination be made to see whether it has in it any entrails, and a report be made of said body.

And it is hereby further resolved, that no doctor shall have the power to pass sentence of death upon any person or persons that may be accused of being a wizzard or witch; and any doctor so offending shall suffer the penalty of death (Debo 1972:46-47).

In 1834, the crime of murder was specifically made to include the killing of a witch or wizard (Debo 1972:177).

After this legal prohibition executions were much less frequent. Edwards says: "I have known but one instance of the kind. This occurred in the winter of 1857 and 1858, during an interregnum of constitutions, when they had no officers to execute the laws" (Edwards 1932:416).

As late as 1884, in the Bogue Chitto area in Mississippi, a Choctaw woman was secretly executed as a witch through the process of customary law (Halbert 1896:536).

McCurtain wrote the following account which may date around this time or slightly later: "It is claimed that a well-educated Choctaw at Antlers [Oklahoma], a minister in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church named Solomon Hotema, killed two children by witchcraft and was in consequence shot by their father" (Swanton 1928c:270-271).

Although condemned by the missionaries, there seems to be little government intervention in these executions. This is because, unless they committed a crime against a white, the Choctaw had little or no contact with white law

enforcement officers throughout most of their history and they therefore continued, until recently, to enforce some parts of their traditional law, particularly in more conservative communities (Peterson 1970:224).

The Logic of Witchcraft

Even though they believed serious misfortunes, illness, and death could be caused by witchcraft, the Southeastern Indians did not equate every small failure, accident, or disappointment with the action of witches. If an inept hunter met with repeated failures, this was readily accepted as a natural occurrence, but if a skilled hunter repeatedly failed to obtain game, suspicion of witchcraft was inevitable. Logically, witchcraft explained events that did not reflect proper adherence to the moral code (Hudson 1978:181).

Bossu describes an incident of bewitchment diagnosed by an eighteenth century Choctaw:

I knew a member of this tribe who had been baptized a short time before. Because he and his comrades had had a poor hunting season, he thought he was bewitched. This new Christian went immediately to see Father Lefevre, the Jesuit who had converted him, and told him that his medicine was worthless. Since he had received it, he had not caught any deer or roebucks. He asked the priest if he would be kind enough to remove his medicine. In order to avoid the Indian's resentment, the Jesuit pretended to "debaptize" him. Some time afterward the "debaptized" Indian, through skill or luck, killed a roebuck and was happily convinced that he was no longer bewitched (Feiler 1962:168-169).

Some twentieth century Choctaw also believe unusual or inexplicable events are the result of witchcraft. Unexpected outcomes in sporting events are sometimes attributed to witches. If an obviously superior team loses a critical tournament or championship game things look suspicious, especially if there is a significant margin in between the two scores. Extraordinary occurrences while a game is in progress also leads to the conclusion that witchcraft is involved. Sometimes a "witched" ball can be seen jumping out of gloves or rackets or skipping over heads (Blanchard 1980:88, 1981:157-158).

Unusual accidents may be the result of a witch's spell as illustrated by the following story:

Once I was walking up to my house and I fell down and couldn't walk. My mother took me to the hospital, and the doctor there told me that I had a sprained ankle. He treated it, but for a month I couldn't walk on it, and it hurt. Finally, I went to the Indian doctor; my mother took me. He looked at it and he told me, "You hurt your ankle when you were walking up to your house last month and fell down."

He knew, even though he hadn't seen it happen. He also told me it was not an accident. Another doctor [witch] had done it to me. Some girl was jealous of me because the boy she liked had a crush on me, so she had him do it to me (Blanchard 1981:153).

Despite the fact it is not difficult to perceive a pattern of logic in this line of reasoning, the common assumption is that witchcraft beliefs are a result of technologically restricted or "primitive" communities. This is not true of the contemporary Choctaw. Nor is it true of numerous other twentieth century Western societies for which a belief in witches persists entirely apart from satanic cults. For example, in the early 1960s Henningsen discovered a group of witch believers in a small Danish town. They defined their beliefs in avant-garde psychological terms. The informants' level of education had no bearing on their adherence to witch beliefs (Henningson 1980:12-13). Favret-Saada's (1977) ethnographic report describes witch beliefs in the countryside of western France. Lewis (1970) reports a 1928 case where three men murdered an alleged witch in York County, Pennsylvania. These occurrences in so called "modern" societies indicate that superstitious behavior is a common response to life's uncertainties.

Summary

Choctaw witches are despised and feared because they selfishly commit evil deeds, including murder frequently for an economic profit, for spite, or under compulsion. They begin their career by attacking their own family members, which is viewed with particular horror in a kin based society.

Witches may be of either sex but are often identified as old people. Their longevity may be the result of adding victims lives to their own. Inclination towards witchcraft is not known to be hereditary. Literally, anyone could be a witch since they sometimes choose to remain anonymous.

Witchcraft has certain relationships to the abilities associated with doctors/medicine men who usually use their occult talents in a benevolent manner. Doctors are adept at diagnosing witch activity. They can remove witchballs from a patient and prescribe witch prophylactics.

Witchballs are magic objects that a witch "shoots" into a person. Witches also suck blood from their victims. Besides causing illness and death by these psychic acts, they can create a wide variety of other misfortunes. Details on their methods are kept secret. However, they are known to receive training and help from supernatural little men.

One nocturnal witch technique involves removing the viscera in order to fly. Witches can take the form of a night bird, other animal, or ball of light. Seeing any of these things is a bad omen.

Within the context of athletic events, where witches are occasionally called upon to "fix" the outcome, there emerges a more relaxed attitude towards witches who represent one's community interest as far as winning the game is concerned.

When inexplicable coincidences happen and the result is unfortunate, witchcraft is a possible interpretation.

NOTES

1. Fogelson (1975:129) claims that the English term witch has been adopted by native Americans in all areas where there has been significant Anglo-American influence. The term sorcerer is not used.
2. There were substantial cultural similarities among Southeastern Indian societies in the prehistoric and protohistoric period. Both Mooney and Swanton remarked on the large number of motifs and stories held in common by these groups (Hudson 1978:121-122).
3. Speaking of the Chickasaw, Speck says: "The word hullo means mystery, supernatural agency, and seems, as far as can be determined, to be similar to Siouan wakan, Algonquin manitu, and Pawnee parunti warunti" (Speck 1907:57).
4. Probably this 'thorn' is a splinter of wood from a tree that has been struck by lightning. Splinters of this sort were potent magic used for both good and evil (Mooney 1886:391, Swanton 1917:477). Lightning-struck wood is impregnated with the power of Thunder whose status is of the highest in the spirit hierarchy (Kilpatrick and Kilpatrick 1967: 188).
5. Notice the resemblance to Mooney's description of the Cherokee raven mocker: "He flies through the air in a fiery shape, with arms outstretched like wings, and sparks trailing behind, and a rushing sound like the noise of a strong wind" (Mooney 1900:401).
6. Edwards also gives an account of this story although he confuses the original witchcraft victim, which Cushman says is a young girl. In Edwards' version:

In the early history of the mission a man died, and old Elliki, who lived near, was pointed out as the witch. A number of the relatives of the deceased armed themselves, and went to her house. She, all unsuspecting, greeted them, and with true Choctaw hospitality, set a bowl of taⁿfula before them. The men approached her, and charged her with causing the death. She had time only to say, "Others tell lies, and you believe them," when the fatal thrust was made, and poor old Elliki was no more (Edwards 1932:416).

Claiborne offers yet a third version of what is, apparently, the same incident:

In 1818, the child of a warrior sickened and died, in spite of all the manipulations of the Medicine-man. He attributed it to witchcraft, and pointed out a very old woman in the neighborhood. Several young braves immediately volunteered to kill her. They repaired to her house and she, with true Indian hospitality, placed before them all the food that was in the house. They chatted pleasantly during the repast, and then suddenly sprang up, gave the war whoop, and literally cut her to pieces" (Claiborne 1880:502).

7. The Alabama called this type of bewitchment impiafotci, "to make him kill nothing" (Swanton 1928b:634).

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