BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE ON THE ETHNOLOGY OF THE SOUTHERN SUDAN

E. E. EVANS-PRITCHARD

The Sudan falls into two distinct cultural parts: the Arabic-speaking Islamic peoples of the north and the heterogeneous pagan peoples of the south. This note is intended as a short guide to those who, while not themselves specialists, desire to know what ethnological research has been done in the Southern Sudan, where the results of this research are to be found, and the point investigations have reached at the time of writing.

In listing the titles of a few books at the end I have cited only the more important sources. Where no bibliographical references to a people are given it need not be assumed that nothing is known about them, but it may be accepted that very little is known about them. I have omitted all purely linguistic works.

Ethnological investigations in the Southern Sudan may be divided into those observations which were chiefly made between the conquest of the Sudan by Muhammad Ali in 1821 and its reconquest by Anglo-Egyptian forces in 1899 and the research that has taken place since the reconquest. Early travellers to the Southern Sudan were not ethnologists. Indeed, scientific ethnology hardly existed at that time. Consequently their writings generally have very limited ethnological value. But some of them were men of science who took great interest in the people they visited and tried to record accurately what they could find out about them. These early travellers also present an admirable picture of the political and economic state of the Southern Sudan during the second half of the last century, which provides an indispensable background for an understanding of the present condition of its peoples. The following books are selected as representative of the better informed travel literature of this period. Where there are English translations reference has been made to the English titles.

Heuglin, Theodor von: *Reise in das Gebiet des Weissen Nil*, 1869.
The establishment of order and of communications after the reconquest of the Sudan permitted renewed exploration and research. In the meanwhile ethno-llogical theory and technique had made great advance and had made specialist investigation possible. After a short expedition, consisting chiefly of a rapid survey of southern Darfung by the ill-fated Dr. A. MacTier Pirrie in 1906–7, Professor and Mrs. Seligman entered the field and subsequent research in it is a direct outcome of their pioneer labours. The Seligmans, in the course of two expeditions to the Southern Sudan, in 1909–10 and 1921–2, made survey studies of the Shilluk, the Dinka, the Bari, some of the communities of the Nuba Mountains, and of some of the Nilo-Hamitic peoples living to the east of the Nile. I, their pupil, continued their work and, between 1926 and 1936 on six expeditions made intensive studies of Azande and Nuer, and surveyed the Anuak, the peoples of southern Darfung, and a number of communities in the Bahr-el-Ghazal.

Sickness, resulting from his research in the Southern Sudan, compelled Professor Seligman to abandon his investigations. On medical advice, my own investigations have been temporarily suspended. However, specialist research continues. Dr. S. F. Nadel, an Austrian ethnologist who had previously done field-work in Nigeria, began a study of the peoples of the Nuba Mountains, particularly of the Otoro and Tira peoples, in 1938; Signor Boccassino, an Italian ethnologist, carried out researches among the Acholi—mainly among the Acholi of Uganda—in 1933–4; and Muhammad Eff. Galal, an Egyptian student of Professor Mauss, commenced survey studies in 1938, devoting his attention chiefly to the Madi and working mainly on the Uganda side of the border.

The Government of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan has always taken an interest in our scientific studies. The researches of the Seligmans and Nadel were entirely financed by the Government and by far the greater
part of my own funds came from the same source. Personally, I have chiefly to thank Sir Harold MacMichael for his interest in, and encouragement of, my studies. Also the Government, in 1918, started a periodical, Sudan Notes and Records, in which have been published a large number of articles, of historical and ethnological value, by officials and missionaries. Though I do not deal with linguistic research in this note, I must also mention here the conference held at Rejaf in 1928, under Government auspices, to discuss some practical linguistic problems in the Southern Sudan. Professor Westermann, a distinguished German scholar who had already done linguistic research in the Southern Sudan, was specialist adviser to the conference. One of its results was the engagement of a linguistic expert, Dr. Tucker, to assist missionaries to produce grammars and dictionaries of a number of Southern Sudan languages. His scientific results have not yet been published in book form. Further evidence of the Government’s interest in ethnological research is the recent appointment of Mr. A. J. Arkell to the post of Director of Anthropology and Archaeology in the Sudan.

The following course of reading, deeper than browsing on the travel-books listed overleaf, is suggested for students. The excellent and fascinating first volume of a lengthy study of the Nile Valley made by Dr. Hurst and Dr. Phillips provides an essential physical background to ethnological studies in the Southern Sudan. The comprehensive monograph by the Seligmans, published in 1932, is the ethnological text-book for the area. It tells the reader what was known about the peoples of the Southern Sudan up to 1932, incorporating what is of scientific relevance in the writings of early travellers, the Seligmans’ own researches, and much, at that time unpublished, information collected by others, chiefly by myself.

The Seligmans’ book is a starting-point for detailed sociological research. It does not itself give a very full account of any people. More detailed accounts are, however, rare. Indeed, it may be said that we possess adequate descriptions of only three peoples; the Shilluk, the Nuer, and the Azande. Very little is known about the other Nilotic peoples (the Dinka and the various Shilluk-speaking communities),

1 Vol. I of Dr. Tucker’s work, entitled Eastern Sudanic Languages, will shortly be published for the Institute by the Oxford University Press.
ETHNOLOGY OF THE SOUTHERN SUDAN

the Nilo-Hamites, the peoples of the ironstone plateau to the west of the Nile, the peoples of the Nuba Mountains, and the peoples of Darfung. For all these peoples the relevant chapters of the Seligmans' book may be consulted. No further references are made to them in the bibliography of this note, in which economy of the students' time is the first consideration. A full tribal bibliography has recently been published in Mr. Hill's excellent volume.

The best-known people in the Southern Sudan are the Azande. There is a good short general account of this people by Mgr. Lagae, a detailed account of their history (of use only to the specialist) by de Calonne Beaufaict, and an intensive sociological study of one department of Zande life by myself. The Shilluk are covered, but less adequately than the Azande, by the books of Hofmayr and Westermann, in conjunction with which the first two chapters of the Seligmans' book should be read. Jackson's pioneer account of the Nuer contains a good general description of their culture. My monograph, to appear in 1940, summarizes what is known about their economic life and political organization.

General.


Shilluk.

Hofmayr, Wilhelm: Die Schilluk, 1925.

Azande.

Calonne-Beaufaict, A. de: Azande, 1921.

Nuer.

In the thirty years that have elapsed since the first expedition of the Seligmans, great progress has been made, but it must still be said that the peoples of the southern part of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan are largely unknown. Peoples of wide regions have been very superficially surveyed. In other regions the survey has been more thorough, but is far from the standard of ethnological research expected in modern scholarship. Only here and there have intensive studies been made. The Southern Sudan is therefore still open country for ethnological discovery and research. It is also an ideal country for the purpose, since its peoples are accessible but have, so far, changed little.

Without giving all the reasons for the selection, it may be of some interest if I suggest the areas in which further study would be of greatest scientific value. Foremost, I would place a detailed sociological study of some section of the Dinka; secondly, a similar study of the Anuak; and thirdly, a survey of the Didinga-speaking and Turkana-speaking groups. Sociological analysis is most fertile when it is possible to compare peoples of related structures and cultures. Each new study of a people then enhances the value of previous studies of other peoples of the same ethnological group. In view of what is known of Nilotic and Nilo-Hamitic peoples the programme of research suggested above is most likely to favour the formulation of scientific generalizations.  E. E. Evans-Pritchard.