Anuak Politics, Ecology, and the Origins of Shilluk Kingship

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The cultural affinities between the Anuak and Shilluk peoples of the Upper Nile have been known for some time. The close relationship between their languages has been established beyond doubt (Westermann 1912: 30-32; Tucker and Bryan 1948: 12-13, 23) and the historical traditions of both peoples tell of their common descent from two brothers who quarrelled and separated (Hofmayr 1925: 62; Evans-Pritchard 1940a: 9; Crazzolara 1950: 42-4). There are many other social and cultural similarities as well. Evans-Pritchard, in his 1948 Frazer-Lecture, and Lienhardt, in a subsequent article (1955: 32), have suggested a common historical and structural relationship between the political systems of these peoples. The purpose of this article is to investigate further the relationship between the Anuak and Shilluk and to give one possible explanation of how Shilluk kingship could have developed out of a political system similar to that presently found among the Anuak, with particular reference to the ecological factors involved.

THE ANUAK

The Anuak have been described by Evans-Pritchard (1940a; 1947) and Lienhardt (1957, 1958). They number between 30,000 and 50,000 people straddling the Sudan-Ethiopian border and living along the Pibor, Sobat, Gila, Akobo, Agwe, Oboth, and Baro rivers, with the majority of the population settled in Ethiopia. They live in small isolated village communities rarely exceeding 500 persons. Economic life centers around the cultivation of millet, maize, and other crops. Although their vocabulary gives evidence of a pastoral past, they are a sedentary people today with little interest in cattle or livestock—a fact which contrasts remarkably with their Nuer, Dinka, and Murle neighbors, all of whom are pastoralists. Sheep, goats, and fowls are raised by the Anuak, but are not of great economic importance. Each village raises enough crops for its own needs and little else. As Evans-Pritchard wrote (1940a: 22): "A predominantly agricultural economy means that each village community is a self-subsistensive group, so that there is no necessity for them to have economic inter-relations."

Ecology combines with agricultural self-sufficiency to promote the isolation and independence of each village group. Northwestern Anuakland is lower and flatter than the regions to the southeast and consequently is subject to flooding during the rainy season, when the area is crosscut by deep watercourses and wide swamps. As a result, the western regions are sparsely populated and some
village communities are forced to move either due to flooding or to drought. Communication between villages is usually difficult and is almost impossible during the rains. As one moves east, however, the open savannah gradually gives way to higher forested land with better water supplies and no flooding. More favorable conditions have led to a greater density of settlement. Villages are located closer together and there is more co-operation and interaction among them.

Considering these conditions it is not surprising that the most important political unit among the Anuak is the village. "The absence of large organized political groups is consistent with the type of country in which Anuak live and their modes of livelihood" (Evans-Pritchard 1940a: 15). The view of the village as the limit of their social world is manifested in the fact that it is the fundamental unit of defense and that no mechanisms exist for obtaining compensation for deaths occurring in fighting between villages. Although the Anuak are grouped into a number of non-exogamous clans, class stands holds little significance in Anuak life. Villages are usually associated with one lineage of a clan and there is little contact among lineages of the same clan in other villages. In each village there is a lineage which is said to be the "owner" of the land (kwai ngam), the original inhabitants and the founders of the village. In smaller villages there may be only one resident lineage; but larger villages may have more than one, the others being regarded as "guests" of the kwai ngam. Ideally (but not necessarily) this lineage should be the dominant political lineage (tuong duong) from which the village headman is chosen. Only male members of this traditional headman's lineage whose biological fathers have served as headmen are eligible for the position.

Since the village represents the limit of everyday Anuak experience, it is not surprising that the village headman should be the symbol of the village. He is the focal point for village loyalty and expresses the uniqueness, unity, and exclusiveness of each village vis-a-vis its neighbors. He controls the village drums and the beads of office. Great formal respect is paid to him. He is never allowed to sit directly upon the ground. Special vocabulary exists for many of his possessions and the buildings of his homestead, which are decorated with carved ornamental poles and grass screens. Those who approach him must do so on their knees and address him respectfully. The headman also has a number of deputies and "court officials" attached to him, and the youths of the village often group themselves around him as temporary followers and retainer (tuak).

The impression should not be given, however, that village headmen are hereditary autocratic rulers. They remain in office only so long as their rule is beneficial to the community. A headman has many obligations to his village, the most important being the generous distribution of food and gifts to his people. A headman retains power only so long as he commands the following of the majority of the village population. He guides his village largely by consensus and force of personality rather than inherent power. He must therefore develop an efficient system of patronage within his village; and this, ultimately, leads to his downfall by exhausting his personal resources. When he has become poor or "stingy" the Anuak see this moment as the opportunity to replace him through an agem or "village revolution," and he is deposed in favor of another member of the ruling lineage whose father was a headman. The ousted headman must
then flee the village, taking with him only what he can carry, usually seeking refuge in a nearby village where he has maternal kin and there hoping for a triumphant return from exile when the people grow tired of his successor. The fact that any son of a former headman is eligible for office, coupled with the steady and persistent drain on personal resources imposed by the office, leads to a frequent turnover in village headmen and a constant Anuak preoccupation with the machinations of local politics.

Among the southeastern Anuak, however, a different political system is found. Although all villages have a headman, in this part of the country headmen must compete for power with a noble clan, the nyiye. The nobles are members of a single patrilineal clan spread throughout Anuakland who have displaced traditional headmen in many villages. According to Anuak myth (Evans-Pritchard 1940a: 76-79; Lienhardt 1955: 36-37) this noble clan was founded by a mysterious man named Ukiro who appeared in the river one day and was captured by the Anuak, who took him to their village and made him their ruler at the expense of an unpopular headman. Ukiro brought with him five bead necklaces, four spears, two stools, a spear-rest, a drum and a few other objects, now lost, which have taken on important ritual functions. The most important of these objects is the ucwook necklace. To become eligible to take over the headmanship of a village a noble must first be invested with these ritual emblems. Investiture is open only to the sons of those nobles who have themselves been invested. Once invested, a member of the nyiye may be invited to replace a headman in the aftermath of a village revolution.

These revolutions occur fairly frequently and mirror tensions among the various rivals for the headmanship of a village. Since many Anuak villages are inhabited by several lineages, only one of which may supply the headman, village politics reflects lineage rivalries. Therefore a lineage residing in a village but not itself supplying the headman may invite a noble to come and reside as its "guest" and candidate for headmanship. All male members of the noble clan who have been invested with the emblems are eligible to become ruling nobles and consequently are rivals with each other. Agnatic links between nobles therefore are generally not very useful in the political process; but since patrilineal descent is the prerequisite for membership in the noble clan, maternal relatives play an extremely important cross-cutting role in the removal of a headman and his replacement by a noble. Non-ruling lineages in a village having maternal ties to members of the noble clan will often invite them to their village as candidates for headmanship and pay for the cost of their investiture with the noble emblems. The noble then takes up residence in the village, marshalls his support, and waits for the moment when a revolution will occur and he will be asked to replace the older line of traditional headmen. Of course he may or may not be successful in this and the resulting interplay of individuals and situations results in a series of relationships, ranging from villages in which the noble clan is the "owner" of the land and its traditional rulers (as well as being nobles) to situations in which nobles are merely residents with no political importance at all (Evans-Pritchard 1947: 81-83).

All nobles are treated with respect by the Anuak, but if a noble succeeds in establishing himself as the new head of a village this respect is intensified. He assumes all the trappings of the traditional headman but these are elaborated to
include a larger ceremonial etiquette and a larger entourage of court officials and retainers (luak), composed mainly of armed youths dedicated to the noble who relish the excitement and prestige of court life. Retaining the favor of these youths (and that of the village as a whole) is no easy task. The noble, like the headman, must curry favor through gifts, generosity, and a shrewd appreciation of where the political realities of the moment lie. To do anything at all he must move the people with him; he cannot act on his own caprice. Although a noble, he is bound by the same strictures of political process as the headman. This is often expensive. For example, Evans-Pritchard reported (1947: 78) one noble who was forced to sacrifice no less than eight oxen from his tiny herd within the first few months of his tenure in office in a bid to keep public support. When the villagers tire of a noble they cannot simply depose him by force. The only way to remove him is to persuade him to leave of his own accord or to invite another noble to come and rule in his place. This noble then has the sanction to attack his rival and drive him out, or kill him.

The Anuak noble clan, then, may be looked upon as a single "lineage" of potential ruling headmen scattered throughout the country instead of localized in just one village. They are bound together by their common ancestry and are bound to the villages in which they establish themselves by links of maternal kinship. Investiture with the noble emblems gives clan members their full status as nobles and allows them to enter the political process; therefore the man who controls the emblems controls investiture. This is extremely important because it determines the flow of eligible candidates into the political system.

According to the historical information collected by Evans-Pritchard (1940a: 76-107) there have been five main phases in the history of the Anuak noble clan. In the earliest period the noble possessing the emblems seems to have retained them until he died, at which time they passed on peacefully to his son. This process was eventually disrupted by dynastic wars in which the owner of the emblems was slain by his successor. As Evans-Pritchard pointed out, this led to the spread of the noble clan, since the noble in possession of the emblems would not allow his kinsmen to reside in the same village with him. They were forced out into the countryside, generally residing with their maternal uncles. In the last century this process stabilized somewhat and the emblems tended to remain in one lineage of the noble clan to the exclusion of other lineages. Occasionally they would pass to a different lineage through peaceful means, such as when cognatic links between the parties were involved. Generally, however, there were wars between rival lineages. The introduction of firearms around 1900 altered this situation and led to the increasing centralization of power in the hands of three powerful nobles and the formation of loose village coalitions. This situation persisted until 1921 when the British began to administer the region and interfered with the political process. Initially this strengthened the position of the man who controlled the emblems, but soon they were removed from the control of any one man and the traditional system, which had been developing towards greater and greater centralization, was ended.

**The Shilluk**

The Shilluk number some 110,000 people living on the west bank of the White Nile from a point roughly twelve degrees north latitude south to Lake
No, a distance of about two hundred miles. To date no satisfactory anthropological monograph has appeared on the Shilluk although various authors have written excellent articles on their life and institutions, particularly Pumphrey (1941) and Howell (1941, 1952). The land inhabited by the Shilluk is open savannah high enough to be free from flooding throughout the year and fertile enough to support a large, nearly continuous, string of settlements running along the river. While possessing considerable numbers of cattle, the Shilluk are in the main agriculturalists who grow millet, maize and various kinds of beans and pumpkins in sufficient quantities to feed a large population. The combination of fertile land and a lack of flooding makes possible a high density of population which contrasts strongly with the desolate surrounding lands. For example, the explorer Georg Schweinfurth, who was not prone to exaggeration, wrote of his 1869 visit to Shillukland (1873: 85):

No know part of Africa, scarcely even the narrow valley of the Nile in Egypt, has a density of population so great; but a similar condition of circumstances, so favorable to the support of a teeming population, is perhaps without parallel in the world. Everything which contributes to the exuberance of life here finds a concentrated field—agriculture, pastoral, fishing, and the chase. Agriculture is rendered easy by the natural fertility of the soil, by the recurrence of the rainy seasons, by irrigation, effected by an atmosphere ordinarily so overclouded as to moderate the radiance of the sun, and so retain throughout the year perpetual moisture.

The Shilluk are divided into approximately one hundred exogamous patrilineal clans. These clans are not territorially defined but are scattered about the country. Only the lineages comprising the clans have any real relationship to residential patterns. The family homesteads (gol) or individual lineage members are grouped together to form hamlets of agnatically related kinsmen. Such a hamlet may be comprised of as many as fifty homesteads. Ultimately these scattered hamlets form larger "settlements" (podh) with a clearly defined territory and common pastures and fishing areas. In each of these settlements an original or "owner" lineage, called the diel, is recognized. Other lineages are said to be the "guests" (wedh) of these people.

The main political officials on the lower level are the various lineage heads and the head of the settlement. The settlement chief is chosen, ideally, from the diel lineage, although he may be replaced by another more powerful person belonging to a different lineage. This position is hereditary, subject to confirmation by the Shilluk reth (king). Above the settlement level Shillukland is divided into eleven districts and two further provinces, Luak in the south and Ger in the north, corresponding roughly to the ceremonial divisions of Gol Nyikang and Gol Dhiang which function at the time of choosing and installing a new reth. But the settlement is, as Howell has written (1952: 101), "the largest political unit which has a permanent and stable function in Shilluk society today."

The religious and political head of the Shilluk nation is the king, or reth. Each reth is thought to be the reincarnation of Nyikang, the Shilluk culture-hero who led them to their present land, and the institution of the rethship is often cited in anthropological literature as an example of "divine kingship" (cf. Frazer 1911: 17-28; Seligman 1911). The supreme being, called Juok, is approached through Nyikang—in fact, the personages of Juok and Nyikang are often not clearly separated. Nyikang in his turn is seen as embodied on earth in

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the person of the king. "The kingship is the common symbol of the Shilluk people and, Nyikang being immortal, an abiding institution which binds past and present and future generations" (Evans-Pritchard 1948: 17). The reth is, therefore, the visible expression of the Shilluk nation, the focal point for Shilluk cosmology, and the center of Shilluk politics. While there is no formal cult either of Nyikang or of Juok, the reth must perform certain rituals pertaining to the rains, the harvests, and so on. In addition, the reth has important legal functions as a mediator of disputes, wielding the moral authority of his office to maintain peace among his people (Oyler 1920; Howell 1952).

The presence of a royal clan leads to certain social distinctions. The majority of the people are collo, commoners, as opposed to the kwur reth, the royal clan. In addition, there are two other groups, the bang reth, descendants of former slaves and retainers of the Shilluk kings linked together by a fictive clanship, and the ororo, a small branch of the royal clan dispossessed by an early king for treachery to him. The distinctions are not of great importance in everyday living but are significant in terms of the political process. Accession to the rethship is dependent upon two things: royal descent and election by a council of chiefs. Of these two descent is by far the more important. Only the son of a reth (nyireth) is eligible to succeed to the office. He need not be the son of the currently ruling reth so long as his father was at one time king. This means that at any given time there are a number of nyireth theoretically eligible to succeed to the office. In fact, it has often been the case that any nyireth who could raise a rebellion, kill the ruling king, and install himself in the royal capital at Fashoda could become reth. This led to strong structural tensions in the Shilluk political system. For this reason no nyireth is allowed to stay the night in Fashoda, and all royal wives are sent to outlying villages upon their pregnancy, there to raise their sons. This procedure has resulted in the royal clan spreading itself across Shillukland, establishing new lineages throughout the countryside which often supplant the ruling lineages in the settlements or hamlets where they become established. As the royal clan is by far the largest clan in Shillukland, comprising about seven per cent of the population, this makes them very important in the political process. Every settlement is likely to have its own "favorite son" nyireth whom they are likely to back as a candidate for the rethship. Maintaining oneself as reth in the face of this potential opposition requires considerable diplomatic skill in manipulating local rivalries and balancing opposed segments of the royal clan.

Upon the death of a reth these tensions are manifest in the process of selecting his successor. The new reth is chosen from among the nyireth by a council of division chiefs, ritually grouped into the ceremonial moieties of Gol Dhiang and Gol Nyikang. Westermann (1912: 122-124) and Hofmayr (1925: 145-146) both suggest that this was done randomly; recently more democratic measures have been introduced (Howell and Thomson 1946: 27-37). However, there is no doubt that in previous times the joint assent of the northern and southern sections of Shillukland had to be obtained. When this did not happen, civil war was likely to break out between the opposing factions, as happened in the last century when reth Kwakker was deposed by the Turkish mudir of Fashoda and Ajang Nykidok was installed as a puppet ruler, never accepted as legitimate king by the southern Shilluk (Howell 1952: 102-3).

Once the successor has been tentatively agreed upon there is a lapse of about
one year prior to his installation to allow the necessary preparations for the installation ceremony to be completed. The death of the *reth* means that the spirit of Nyikang has been released and is now abroad in the country. Of this the Shilluk say *piny bugon,* ("there is no land"), or as Evans-Pritchard has explained it (1948: io) "the center of the Shilluks' world has fallen out." The process of installing a *reth* is, therefore, largely a process of persuading the spirit of Nyikang to enter the new king and by so doing to reanimate the land and give his consent to the recreation of the order of Shilluk society. This concept of renewing or recreating Shillukland is the heart of the ceremony. The country is divided into two opposed halves, Gol Dhiang in the south—the half associated with the *reth*-elect—and Gol Nyikang in the north, associated with Nyikang himself, being the place where he ascended to the heavens in the midst of a great thunderstorm at the end of his stay on earth. Each half forms a mock army and they both march toward a common meeting place at the center of Shillukland, just outside the royal capital of Fashoda. The army of Gol Dhiang is preceded by the *reth*-elect; the army of Gol Nyikang is preceded by effigies of Nyikang and his sons, Dak and Cal. The spirits of Nyikang, Cal, and Dak are thought to animate these effigies at this time. The journey symbolically recreates the myth of the Shilluk migration and the founding of Shillukland by Nyikang and his sons (cf. Oyler 1918). On the outskirts of Fashoda the *reth*-elect and his party cross the watercourse of Arepujur and are there beset by the army of Nyikang in a mock battle. Nyikang is victorious and the candidate is taken captive into the capital. Here the ceremony of installation takes place. The new *reth* is given possession of the ritual objects of kingship: the sacred spear of Nyikang, beads from the Nuba mountains said to have been part of his daughter Adwai's bridewealth, a silver ring taken in battle, and especially the sacred stool. The effigy of Nyikang dances up to the stool and is seated upon it, with the *reth*-elect bowed down in front of it holding the legs. The effigy is then lifted off the stool and goes with the effigies of Dak and Cal into a special shrine. The *reth* is seated upon the stool and invested with the sacred emblems. Howell and Thomson write (1946: 62), with reference to the installation of *reth* Anei Kur:

The act of substitution upon the stool symbolizes to the Shilluk the possession of the *reth* by the spirit of Nyikang, and we saw that the *reth* was seized with a trembling fit at the critical moment, and certainly appeared to be in a dazed condition immediately afterwards, when he walked across to the temporary camp opposite the shrine.

Following this installation the *reth* is kept in seclusion under the joint supervision of the chiefs of the north and south, and is bathed alternately with hot and cold water so that his rule will be moderate and not subject to extremes. He is also given a girl, called the *nyakwer,* to symbolize the union of Nyikang and the land. All the fires in Fashoda, which have been extinguished, are rekindled, representing the departure and return of stability, light, and new life. The Shilluk world is recreated.

**The Origins of Shilluk Kingship**

An examination of the respective political systems of the Anuak and Shilluk leads one to the conclusion that there is a common structural, if not an actual historical, relationship between them. Anuak politics, with its competing sys-
tems of headmanship and nobility, can be looked upon as an embryonic form of the Shilluk rethship, and it seems not unlikely that the political system of the Shilluk was at one time very much like that found in Anuak villages which, for ecological and historical reasons, went through an accelerated process of development.

A comparison of certain features common to both systems tends to confirm this. For example, in both cases eligibility for the position in question, be it noble or reth, depends upon direct patrilineal descent from a previously invested predecessor. Actual accession to a position of power depends upon "election," in the case of the Anuak by being asked to come replace a village headman or, in the case of the Shilluk by being asked to succeed to the kingship by a council of chiefs. Among the Anuak the maternal kin of the noble play an exceedingly important role in his investiture and form the power base from which he may spring to replace the headman. The fact that the Shilluk nyireth are brought up in the villages of their maternal kin and the fact that the reths seem to have ruled from their maternal villages prior to the establishment of the capital at Fashoda (Lienhardt 1954: 141; Seligman 1932: 47) seems to indicate an analogous situation at an early period in Shilluk history. In more recent times we may note that a dissatisfied nyireth, in raising a rebellion against the king, was supported in large part by his local (generally maternal) community. This seems to indicate stresses in the Shilluk polity similar to those found among the Anuak (Lienhardt 1955).

There are parallels as well in the ritual and ceremonial aspects of Anuak nobility and the Shilluk rethship. Both the noble clan of the Anuak and the royal clan of the Shilluk trace their ancestry to semi-divine personages having intimate ties with the river. Ukiro, the founder of the Anuak nobility, simply appeared one day out of the water and was later captured and made ruler of an Anuak village (Evans-Pritchard 1940a: 76-79; Lienhardt 1955: 36-37). Nyikang, founder of the Shilluk nation and the first reth, was the daughter of Nyikya, a water spirit, half woman, half crocodile, still venerated among the Shilluk and thought to have the capacity to judge right and wrong in legal cases through trial by ordeal (Banholzer and Giffen 1905: 197). Among both peoples certain ritual objects legitimize the office holders: spears, beads and drums among the Anuak; spears, beads, bracelets, and the sacred stool of Nyikang among the Shilluk. Special vocabulary exists for use in the court of the Anuak nobles (Evans-Pritchard 1940a: 66); likewise there exist certain "royal language conventions" for the court of the reth (Pumphrey 1937). Anuak nobles are buried in a different fashion from ordinary Anuak and the graves, as well as trees near them, are respected (Evans-Pritchard 1940a: 70-75). Among the Shilluk this practice has been elaborated to the point where the graves of dead reths are maintained as special shrines associated with the spirit of the reth and with Nyikang, attended by hereditary caretakers (Seligman 1931).

These similarities can be fitted together into a larger whole when the broad outlines of Nilotic history are considered. According to the common tradition of the Anuak and Shilluk peoples they arrived in their present lands as the result of a great migration. The leader of this movement was Nyikang, the Shilluk culture-hero. One of the chiefs with Nyikang was his brother Gilo, with whom he had a great quarrel. Gilo and his followers separated from the others and
moved away to found the Anuak people (Seligmam 1932: 109; Evans-Pritchard 1940a: 9-10; Hofmayer 1925: 62). This story forms part of a much broader tradition of the early history of the Nilotes in which they migrated from a homeland in the south. Father J. P. Crazzolara has collected the traditions of most of the Lwo-speaking peoples of East Africa, to which group the Anuak and Shilluk belong, and has pieced together a general outline of their early history through a comparative analysis of these materials (Crazzolara 1950). From this information, and that presented by Hofmayer (1925) it appears that the Shilluk and the Anuak migrated from their southern homeland to their present location some time in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries.

The social and political organization of these early migrants was undoubtedly loose, even as it is among most Nilotic peoples today.\(^5\) Probably they were pastoralists moving northward with their herds of cattle, similar in many respects to the present Nuer and Dinka tribes who seem to have been the first Nilotes to reach the area (Crazzolara 1950: 15; Ogot 1964: 287-288). As the Shilluk-Anuak group spread out they settled in sedentary communities, gradually abandoning their cattle in favor of an agricultural economy. Although their languages contain many cattle-related words indicative of a nomadic past, today the Anuak possess virtually no cattle and have only the slightest interest in them. Indeed, there is a myth in which it is said that while God granted cattle to all the people, the Anuak killed theirs and so today are cattleless (Evans-Pritchard 1940a: 20). In similar fashion the Shilluk, while maintaining herds, do not leave their permanent settlements to follow them and possess many fewer cattle than do their Nuer and Dinka neighbors (Howell 1950: 100). Their economy is far more agricultural than pastoral. The adoption of such a sedentary way of life necessitated certain changes, the most important of which was the adoption of the village (as opposed to the cattle-camp) as the fundamental unit of social life and the creation of the village headman—a type of office unknown among the nearby Nuer and Dinka. The village became the main unit of defense. A dominant lineage supplied the headman. All in all, the system was probably like that now found among the scattered village communities of the western Anuak.

Ecological conditions vary throughout this area and affect settlement patterns. The territory occupied by the present-day Anuak is not conducive to a high population density, particularly in the western regions. Here villages remain fairly isolated, self-contained units, frequently fortified by moats and stockades (Evans-Pritchard 1940a: 16-17). In southeastern Anuakland the villages are located more closely together and a higher density of population obtains as a result. Among the Anuak ecological conditions seem to set certain limits on the size of villages with resultant effects in local politics. As Lienhardt has written (1958: 26):

Since economic difficulties within a village tend to be reflected in changes of headmen, it is probable that this way of reducing the size of a village by division has a necessary economic function which the Anuak themselves do not recognize. The evidence suggests that it has been the largest villages which have been sundered by disagreements over the headmanship, and that such villages have been hosts to many “guests,” and have thus probably begun to increase in size beyond the possible local resources of land and food.

In striking contrast to these conditions the Shilluk occupy a highly favorable
ecological niche capable of supporting a large densely settled population. As the Shilluk moved across the Nile they left the low swampy areas behind them and were able to form a nearly unbroken line of settlements stretching some two hundred miles along the west bank of the river, from Muomo to Tonga. Among these Nilotes, then, the areas of sparsest population are the least centralized politically. Scattered villages, each forming an individual polity, are the rule in western Anuakland while the more densely populated lands of the southeast harbor the competing systems of headmanship and nobility, with the villages linked together through a common sentiment about the noble emblems and a common respect for a noble clan. Among the Shilluk, who have the greatest density of settlement, a single royal clan is spread throughout the countryside and the people pay honor to a king who is the visible symbol of their nationhood.

In the earliest times it seems likely that the Shilluk lived in villages presided over by a headman coming from a dominant lineage; but the density of population, ease of communication and travel up and down the river, closeness of villages to each other, and a common cultural heritage undoubtedly led to a greater feeling of unity among the Shilluk than was found in the much more sparsely settled regions to the south. Neighboring villages must have maintained frequent intercourse with each other, and such contact would have taken on increased importance if particular clans or lineages competed with each other for power in these regions. The size of the royal clan at the present time indicates that it must have begun spreading early and voraciously, and it is easy to see how the villages of Shillukland could have been drawn together into a system of ritualized politics similar to that found among the southeastern Anuak. Replacing a headman with a member of the royal clan would give local political activity an impetus which would carry on outside the particular village in question. The royal clan would have served as the focal point for unifying the people and led to the development of a centralized political system, the creation of the retsh. A need to unite against a common enemy would have spurred the process on, and as the Shilluk began to interact with one another in this manner the elaboration of myth and ceremony centering on Nyikang and the retsh would have given them a common ritual ground expressive of their growing unity as a people.

Such a view accords with Shilluk traditions. The first retsh held court in the villages of the maternal kin by whom they were raised. At his time no one man had been able to muster sufficient power to create a central seat for the retsh. Opposition from collateral lineages of the royal clan probably made the position of the reigning retsh somewhat precarious. In an unstable political situation the benefits of ruling from the village of one's maternal kin would have been obvious. However, retsh Tugo, the ninth or tenth Shilluk king (his position varies in the king-lists), is credited with establishing the royal capital at Fashoda and with instigating the full ceremonies of investiture at a time when the Shilluk were at war with the neighboring Dinka (Hofmayer 1925: 72-74; Cazzollara 1950: 134; Lienhardt 1955: 41; Ogot 1964: 299). Tugo had a reputation as a great warrior (as did his predecessor Tokot) and it seems likely that the break with the traditional practice of ruling from the home of his maternal kin was brought about by military necessity. Tugo's military prowess, coupled with the
threat of Dinka incursions into Shilluk lands, gave him a strong enough base to push the incipient tendency towards ritualized political leadership to its ultimate conclusion. The "divine kingship" was born. Gradually the reth assumed more and more ritual functions, becoming in essence the "high priest" of the Shilluk people with responsibilities at the time of harvest and obligations as a rainmaker (Seligman 1932: 80-82), in addition to his position as a military leader and functionary of justice. These religious duties have no parallel among the Anuak. The development of a single focus for the social order in this manner was mirrored and undergirded by the mythology of Nyikang, who symbolized the reth and his relation to the Shilluk order (cf. Oyler 1918b; Lienhardt 1954). The reth became the symbol of the Shilluk people as a whole, and with this newfound unity they were able to organize a powerful military machine, at least nominally controlled from Fashoda, which enabled them to establish their suzerainty for hundreds of miles up and down the river. Population density, favorable ecology, and a higher level of political organization than that found among any of their neighbors allowed the Shilluk to dominate the upper reaches of the White Nile until the coming of the Turks in the early nineteenth century (cf. Mercer 1971).

To the south their Anuak cousins lagged behind. Sparsely settled in isolated village communities they only gradually developed common political ties. Fragmented, the Anuak were helpless in the face of widespread Nuer raiding—something with which the Shilluk were never bothered (Evans-Pritchard 1940b: 132). Only with the introduction of firearms toward the end of the last century did the nobility-influenced system of Anuak politics begin to move towards centralization, a process which was interrupted and then stopped by the intervention of British administration. Among the western Anuak no such system developed. It is likely that, given time, the noble clan might have extended itself through that area and gradually united the Anuak people into a single body politic; but it is highly doubtful that the Anuak could ever attain the level of organization found among the Shilluk.

In sum, it appears that in comparing the Anuak and Shilluk peoples of the Nile basin, we see a common political structure developing at differential rates, affected mainly by ecological variations in the lands they occupy, with the historical end result that one group, the Shilluk, have emerged into full nationhood while the Anuak have remained less aware of the common ties that bind them together as a people. Hocart (1936) suggested that government originated out of a ritual organization designed to secure life for the community. It seems that in the case of Shilluk kingship we have an example of central "government" emerging from just such a system of ritualized politics.

NOTES
1. I am indebted to Dr. Godfrey Lienhardt of the Institute of Social Anthropology at Oxford University for supervising the research that led to this paper, and for many helpful remarks pertaining to it.
2. The account of the Anuak which follows is based upon these sources.
3. The account of the Shilluk which follows is based upon these sources.
4. These two accounts have been abstracted to provide the following account of the installation ceremony.
5. General surveys of the Nilotes may be found in Seligman (1932) and Butt (1952). Early history and political traditions for the Nilotes as a whole are treated in summary fashion by Ogot (1964).

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