



# Nuer Religion

*Edward E. Evans-Pritchard*

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Nuer, a cattle-herding people dwelling in the swamps and savannah of the southern Anglo-Egyptian Sudan: The Nuer. A description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of an Nilotic People was published in 1940 and Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer in 1951. The present volume, Nuer Religion, completes a study of the Nuer which began in 1930. Accounts of religion in writings on the Nuer are generally meagre and superficial. The only detailed treatment is in Father J. P. Crazzolara's *Die Gesellschaft und Religion der Nuer* (1953), much of which appeared earlier in volume viii of Father W. Schmidt's *Der Ursprung der Gottesidee* (1949). Those who read his account will see that it differs in many respects from what I now present, though less with regard to fact than in emphasis and interpretation. Although Nuer religious ideas and practices were a part of their way of life which greatly interested me, it was that to which I was able to give least attention during my short residence of a year in Nuerland. It was necessary to learn their language and to study their manner of livelihood and their family, kinship, and political activities before giving close attention to the more difficult problems of their religious thought. These tasks, all the heavier in the arduous conditions in which they had to be carried out, left me little time to pursue anything which could be called a systematic inquiry into religious matters. What I record I witnessed myself or is information given spontaneously during talks about other and more practical affairs or in comment on some event or experience. Such observations may, however, be more valuable in a study of religious thought than those derived from purposive inquiry. This is especially so when a people lack, as the Nuer do, anything which offers easy scope for such an inquiry, for they have nothing which can properly

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