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## THE SACRIFICIAL ROLE OF CATTLE AMONG THE NUER

E. E. EVANS-PRITCHARD

IN my two books on the Nuer I gave some account of the importance of cattle in their economy and social life. I scarcely mentioned their role in religion as I did not wish to stray too far from the topics I was then discussing. I summarize very briefly what was said there before discussing their religious significance.

Nuer are very largely dependent on the milk of their herds and, in their harsh environment, they probably could not live without them, any more than the cattle could survive without the care and protection of their owners. Their carcasses also furnish Nuer with meat, tools, ornaments, sleeping-hides, and various other objects of domestic use; and their sun-dried dung provides fuel for the great smouldering smudges that give protection from mosquitoes to man and beast alike. Women are more interested in the cows, and this is natural for they have charge of milking and dairy work. Men's interest in the cows is rather for their use in obtaining wives, and they are interested in the oxen for the same reason, and also because they provide them with a means of display and, which is the matter I am about to discuss, a means of sacrifice. But for all Nuer—men, women, and children—cattle are their great treasure, a constant source of pride and joy, the occasion also of much foresight, of much anxiety, and of much quarrelling; and they are their intimate companions from birth to death. It is not difficult to understand, therefore, that Nuer give their cattle devoted attention, and it is not surprising that they talk more of cattle than of anything else and have a vast vocabulary relating to them and their needs. Nevertheless, though they are much attached to their beasts, we must beware of putting into Nuer minds a sentimentality about animals so often found among ourselves. In fact, they regard them as rather stupid creatures.

Though I do not repeat all I have earlier said about the value cattle have for Nuer in mundane affairs, particularly in the milk they give and their use as bridewealth, and restrict myself here to a consideration of their religious significance, we must not for a moment forget that their religious significance is bound up with their secular uses. Otherwise the central part cattle play in sacrifice will not be understood. Nevertheless, if cattle were only used for food and obtaining wives, writers about the Nuer, and also writers about other Nilotic peoples, might have been content just

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to draw attention to the great interest these peoples have in their cattle. But cattle figure so prominently in their lives in ways not directly concerned with their maintenance or their use for practical purposes that European observers have perceived that in the relationship between men and cattle there is something more than can be stated in simple terms of husbandry and exploitation. Some writers even suggest that cattle are venerated. I mention only those who refer specifically to the Nuer. Marno says that we may speak of their veneration (*Verehrung*) of cattle, and that the largest and finest ox (*Stier*) of a herd is regarded as a guardian genius (*schützende Genius*), and that they refer to this beast by the same name, *nyeledit*, as they assign to the conception of a Supreme Being and to thunder.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Mr. Jackson tells us that the bull which a youth receives from his father at initiation 'is a kind of guardian spirit of its owner who calls upon it in times of stress and difficulty' and in another place he speaks of this bull as the 'tutelary spirit' of its owner.<sup>2</sup> Captain H. H. Wilson says of the Nuer that, like the other Nilotic peoples of the White Nile, 'what religion they possess is centred in the cow';<sup>3</sup> and Professor Westermann writes that 'the attachment of a man to his cows and of a boy to the bull with which his father presents him may almost be called religious'.<sup>4</sup> There is, however, no evidence at all that cattle are venerated or in themselves are in any way regarded as guardian spirits, and in so far as it may be true to say that Nuer religion 'is centred in the cow' or that their attachment to cattle 'may almost be called religious', in so far, that is, as we may legitimately speak, as Marianne Schmidl did in her interesting paper on the subject,<sup>5</sup> of '*die sakrale Stellung des Rindes*', it is for a different reason.

Another writer about the Nilotic peoples and a very experienced anthropologist, Professor C. G. Seligman, said about Nilotic cattle that 'it is difficult to describe their importance to their masters or the love and care the latter have for their beasts, but it is certainly no exaggeration to say that it amounts to what psychologists would call "identification"'.<sup>6</sup> What seems chiefly to have persuaded Professor Seligman to use this word is the Nilotic custom of taking personal names from their cattle in addition to the personal names they are given soon after birth. I have discussed elsewhere<sup>7</sup> the general social significance of names and other modes of address among the Nuer and here I speak only of their cattle-names and principally of their ox-names, these being of chief importance.

These names are often spoken of in writings about the Nuer as bull-names, but ox-names (using the word 'ox' to denote a castrated bull) is a more correct designation.<sup>8</sup> Nuer speak always of such a name as *cot thak*, the name of an ox, and *thak* is a castrated animal in contrast to a *tut*, an entire animal. It is true that when a youth

<sup>1</sup> Ernst Marno, *Reisen im Gebiete des blauen und weissen Nil*, 1874, pp. 343 and 349-50, '*Nyeledit*' may be a faulty transcription of '*nhial e dit*', 'the sky is big', but that expression would not make any sense if applied to a bull, and it is certainly not used in reference to God or thunder.

<sup>2</sup> H. C. Jackson, 'The Nuer of the Upper Nile Province', *Sudan Notes and Records*, vi, 1923, pp. 94 and 96.

<sup>3</sup> *The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*, edited by Lieut.-Col. Count Gleichen, i, 1905, p. 140.

<sup>4</sup> Ray Huffman, *Nuer Customs and Folk-Lore*,

1931, p. vii.

<sup>5</sup> Marianne Schmidl, 'Die Grundlagen der Nilotenkultur', *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien*, lxxv. Band, Wien, 1935. See also Johannes Weissenborn, *Tierkult in Afrika*, 1904, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> C. G. and B. Z. Seligman, *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan*, 1932, p. 169.

<sup>7</sup> E. E. Evans-Pritchard, 'Nuer Modes of Address', *Uganda Journal*, xii, 1948.

<sup>8</sup> Throughout the literature on the Nuer 'ox' or 'steer' or 'bullock' should in most cases be substituted for 'bull'.

takes his name from a beast it may be entire, but it will be castrated later, for he would not be given it, nor therefore take his name from it, were it intended for stud purposes. Nuer may not castrate a male calf till it is nearly 2 years old, but they do so before it is likely to gender with the cows. It is not from pedantry that I make the distinction: it has a logical, and perhaps psychological, appositeness to the equation of man and ox in sacrifice.

Ox-names are essentially the names of men, males who have passed through the rite of initiation to manhood. Boys may take ox-names in play but only in imitation of their elders. Likewise, maidens may take ox-names, from bulls calved by the cows they milk, but they are mainly used only between girls themselves and in the nature of a game, copying their brothers; and the names are short-lived and have little currency. Married women use cow-names among themselves, but, here again, this is similitude, and it has none of the significance of the ox-names of men. Perhaps also here again the distinction between the copy-names of boys, girls, and women and those taken by men may be important because of its logical relation, which concerns our present discussion, to the fact that men, and not boys or women, are the sacrificial agents. The two sides of the standard equation are the human male and the bovine male, man and ox.

When a boy is initiated to manhood his father gives him in sign of his manhood an ox or, as I have explained, a bull calf which will later be castrated; and this ox, which he describes as '*thak gareda*', 'the ox of my initiation', becomes his *dil thak*, what I have spoken about as his favourite ox (Marno's '*Lieblingsstier*'), though the word *dil* has generally the sense of 'pure', 'true', 'perfect', or 'aristocratic'. It is the ox of perfection. It is the young man's friend and companion. He plays with it and fondles it. He composes poems about it and sings them to it, and he gets a small boy to lead it round the camp in the morning or evening as he leaps behind it chanting poems. He walks among the cattle at night ringing a cattle-bell and singing of his kin, his loves, and his cattle, and he praises this ox above all other oxen. He makes tassels to hang from one of its horns, and he loves to see it toss the tassel in the air with a sweep of the neck. He acquires an iron bell to hang round its neck, and no music, unless it be the ox's lowing, is sweeter to his ears than its tinkling in the pastures. He goes to the edge of the camp to meet it when it returns from grazing in the evening. He is never tired of describing its points, and as he does so, and also in dancing, he may hold up his arms in imitation of its horns. Should the ox die he is downcast; and should he die it must be sacrificed at his mortuary ceremony.

The youth now also enters through this ox into a new kind of relationship with God, the guardian spirits of his family and lineage, and the ghosts of his ancestors. When he has tethered it in the kraal for the night he may pet it, removing ticks from its belly and scrotum and picking out adherent dung from its anus; and he may at the same time rub ashes on its back. Ordinarily, I think he does this simply because the ox, which has suffered from parasites throughout the day, gets pleasure from its back being rubbed, but I was told that he may occasionally utter a prayer or invocation as he does so, speaking to God or to the ghosts. I discuss this point again later. Here I want only to say that while it is not until a man marries and has children and an independent household that he sacrifices animals, dedicates them to spirits, and in other ways makes formal use of them for religious purposes, nevertheless, the ox

a father gives his son at initiation provides him, through what Professor Seligman calls 'identification' with it, with a direct means of communication with the spiritual world. It is more than a possession, more even than part of his social personality—it is a point of meeting between soul and spirit and has therefore a sacramental character.

From the colours, their distribution, the shape of the horns, and other peculiarities of the ox of his initiation a youth takes, or is given by his companions, his *cot thak*, his ox-name. It may be the same word as that by which the ox's markings are indicated but generally it combines the name for the markings with a prefix descriptive of something connected with the ox. For example, a man whose favourite ox is black and white (*rial*) may call himself *Luthrial* or *Luerial*, *luth* being a large cattle-bell and *lue* a long tassel attached to one of the horns. At first only his age-mates may know his new name, but the older people soon get to know it too, for they hear his mates greet him by it and they also hear him shout it out as he displays himself with the ox in the cattle camps which are formed soon after initiation. Also, young men of about the same age call out their ox-names, with many embellishments, to one another at dances, often after a bout of duelling with clubs, and when in a dance two lines of youths stand opposite each other and shower ox-names on one another preparatory to a spectacular jump into the air in unison.

The calling of a youth by a name the same as, or derived from, that by which his favourite ox is referred to is perhaps the most striking example of, and evidence for, what Professor Seligman speaks of as 'identification'. Indeed, in listening to Nuer poems one is often in doubt whether it is the ox or the man that is being spoken about. The representations are never quite distinct. Somewhat different, though related and also very striking, is the custom called *thak moc*, the calling out of the (name of the) ox. A man shouts out the name of his favourite ox—the ox's name, not his ox-name which may be an elaboration of the ox's name—when he hurls his spear at an enemy or at his quarry when hunting or fishing; for example, '*ma rial*' 'black-and-white (ox)', or '*thakda ma rial*', 'my black-and-white ox'. In some of my earlier writings I have translated *moc* by 'invocation' and 'to invoke', following Driberg's translation of the Lango *gwongo*,<sup>1</sup> but I avoid doing so in an account of Nuer religion partly because I have used these words to translate another Nuer word, *lam*, but also because nothing is in fact invoked, and it is precisely the use of the words in connexion with oxen that has led to the erroneous conclusion that a favourite ox is a sort of 'tutelary spirit'. The ox is not called on, but called out. It is not an invocation but a cry of excitement and triumph as the striker strikes and hits his foe or prey. That the ox is not being called on for aid is conclusively shown by the fact that in the same circumstances a Nuer may shout out instead '*tet cueda*' followed by a kinship term, usually that referring to the mother's sister: '*tet cueda malene*', 'my right hand, my mother's sisters'. Nuer are not calling on their mother's sisters for aid but using an emotive ejaculation, in which the ideas of strength (the right hand) and good-will (the mother's sister) are combined; and when they cry out the names of their oxen the ejaculation is a triumphant assertion of the self, for which the ox stands as a symbol. Also a man may cry out the name of his ox on occasions when there is no question of success or failure: as he brandishes his spear as though to strike in

<sup>1</sup> J. H. Driberg, *The Lango*, 1923, pp. 109–10: 'One who takes a hostile spear on his shield invokes by name a favourite bull belonging to his father or maternal uncle (*gwongo twon*).'

dancing, when making spectacular leaps into the air (*rau*), and sometimes in making a sacrificial invocation. It is both self-expression and a drawing of attention to the self.

It should be borne in mind that a man normally retains his ox-name and continues to be called by it and also to shout out the name of the ox from which it is derived long after the ox is no more in his possession. A man may part, though always with regret, with a favourite ox for marriage or sacrifice, or the ox may die. It is then replaced by another favourite, though when a man is older and has a herd of his own he may not identify himself in quite the same way or to the same extent as when he was young with any one particular ox. If another ox takes the place of the first favourite, the ox of initiation, its owner may take, or be given, a new ox-name derived from this second ox; the new name then takes the place of the old or both are used; but most men keep for life the ox-names they acquire at the time of their initiation. It is the name of this ox that a man shouts out in war, hunting, dancing and leaping, and in sacrificial invocations, and by which, in one or other form, he is addressed by his peers; though it has long ago departed. Fundamentally, therefore, it is not the ox of initiation itself with which there is 'identification' but ox, the idea of oxen. The ox of initiation is the prototype of the ox-man relationship, and it is a kind of focal point at which the feelings a Nuer has towards cattle converge and run over into demonstration by word and gesture. When the ox is long ago dead the relationship continues because ultimately it is not one between a man and a particular beast, which serves only, as a first favourite or as a replacement, to express, since men's hearts are small, through a particular and personal relationship of possession a general relationship of a human being to cattle which, I am about to suggest, derives from the sacramental equation of man and beast in sacrifice. Any ox will therefore serve the purpose, or, indeed, no ox at all—only the memory, or rather the idea, of an ox.

We may ask why the identification is with oxen and not with bulls. It might be expected that a man, who is himself a '*tut*', a 'bull', not only in the general sense of 'male', but also in a common metaphor of speech derived expressly from cattle, would take his name from a bull rather than from an ox. The common-sense answer is that Nuer castrate all but a very few of their bulls so that there would not be enough entire animals to go round, and this may be the right explanation. Even if it is not, or is not a sufficient explanation, we must here take it as given that the equation is between man and ox and seek only to show how it is expressed in ritual, and in particular in the sacrificial situation. But it is perhaps necessary to remark that Nuer evaluation of bulls and oxen is not ours. Our representation of an ox, in contrast to a bull, is a docile, inferior, and slightly contemptible beast destined for the slaughter-house. In the Nuer representation a fat ox is a thing of grandeur and beauty. It is oxen which arouse their admiration. Bulls evoke utilitarian interest rather than emotional and aesthetic attention.

The facts I have related make it understandable that Professor Seligman should have spoken of 'identification' of men with their favourite oxen. Had he had either a first-hand or a wider knowledge of the Nuer he would no doubt have elaborated his theme, and especially by drawing on the ceremonies of initiation for illustrations.

A youth takes his cry and his personal name from the markings and other traits of the ox his father gives him at initiation. By the rites of initiation boys are made

men, and this means, among other things, a conspicuous change in their relation with the cattle. They now cease to look after the calves and sheep and goats and to perform the more menial services of kraal and byre. Instead they tend the adult cattle. The most marked change is that whereas before initiation they helped the women milk the cows they now altogether cease to milk. But these external and evident changes are accompanied by a deeper, and hidden, transformation, men and oxen being brought into an intimacy of relationship on a different plane from that of mere proximity and association, however close, so that in some way an equation is brought about between man and ox. Such would seem to be the interpretation of certain very peculiar, though outstanding, features of the initiation rites. I have described these rites and discussed their social significance elsewhere;<sup>1</sup> here I shall only draw attention to those features which have a special relevance to our immediate problem.

The rites direct our attention throughout to the relationship between men and cattle. It is the *wut ghok*, the Man of the Cattle, to which he stands in a special ritual relationship, who opens and closes the periods of initiation. During the period of initiation the initiates may not have any contact with the cattle, which are a danger to them till their wounds are completely healed and they formally pass out of seclusion. The prohibition extends even to rubbing ashes of cattle-dung over their bodies, a practice common to all Nuer men and boys; though the fact that they drink milk suggests that the taboo really concerns their relation to the oxen rather than to cattle in general, just as the taboo on women drinking milk during their periods concerns their relation to cows and not to cattle in general. In the terminal rite of initiation, when the initiates are 'loosened' (*lony rar*, the verb *lony* being that used for loosening cattle from their tethering-pegs) they re-establish their contact with the cattle. They are pelted by their seniors with cattle-dung (*buk ka war*). Then they wash in a stream. On their return to the homestead they beat the cattle with wild rice, and afterwards rub themselves with ashes of cattle-dung. They spend the rest of the day leaping and chanting behind the oxen given them by their fathers, and possibly, if they are lucky, by their paternal and maternal uncles also, which are the first oxen they can call their own. The fact that after initiation there is a taboo on men milking also seems to point to an opposition between women and cows on the one side and men and oxen on the other side and to further emphasize the equation of man and ox.

One might perhaps feel that one was attributing to the facts a symbolical significance which the evidence does not sustain were it not that further, and very striking, observations push one to the interpretation put forward. Thus, the name of the dances held at the initiation ceremonies is *ruath*, the word for a bull-calf from the time it is weaned, that is to say a bull, normally destined to be an ox, which has broken with its dam in the same way as a youth at initiation cuts, as we would put it, the apron strings which have before tied him to his mother, especially in the matter of food, as some of the symbolism of the rites, which we need not here discuss, indicates. One says '*ba ruath puot*', 'the bull-calf (dance) is held'—or it may be the plural form *ruedh*, 'the (dance of the) bull-calves is held'. One speaks also of '*bul ruedhni*', 'the dance of the bull-calves', and of the '*bul ruath dholi*', a phrase which might be rendered as 'the dance of the bull-calf boys'; and the lewd songs sung on

<sup>1</sup> 'The Nuer: Age-sets', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1936. Since this article was written I have obtained further information which has not been published.

these occasions are known as ' *diit ruadha* ', 'bull-calf songs'. The metaphor in these expressions seems to be clear: the initiates are equated with the young bulls, though I have never heard Nuer explicitly make the equation. Before initiation a boy is a small calf (*dou*), during initiation he is a *ruath*, an immature bull, and after initiation he is a *tut*, a bull; and one may speak of an initiated man as either *wut*, man, or *tut*, bull. Further, between the cutting of the marks of manhood on a boy's forehead and his ceremonial emergence from seclusion (or exclusion from the normal life) he is known as *cot*, which appears to be the same word as that used for a hornless cow or ox. That it is probably the same word and that the metaphor is an overt similitude is shown by the remark made to me by a Nuer to explain its use in reference to initiates that ' they are like hornless cattle at this time ', by which I suppose was meant that they are in the helpless position of a beast without horns. It is remarkable also that Nuer compare the cutting (*ngat*) of one of the horns of a favourite ox (it is an entire animal at the time) so that it will grow against the cut at a fancy angle, generally in a curve across the muzzle (*ma gut*), to the initiation of youths. They say that the operation, which is performed before castration and appears to cause the animal much pain, is the *gar*, the cutting of the marks of manhood, of the young bulls. If the operation has not already been carried out before a father presents a young bull to his son at initiation it is likely to be one of the young man's first acts in the period immediately following his own initiation. There appears to be another correspondence here. Soon after their initiation youths, if they can procure the metal, fasten bracelets up their left arms so tightly as to render them, for the time of their wearing, incapable of use; and it is, I believe invariably, the left horn of oxen that they similarly render useless by deforming it. Nuer frequently imitate with their arms the trained and untrained horns of an ox, and when I sometimes did the same and made the mistake of using my right arm to represent the trained horn, it was always greeted with shouts of laughter.

This equation of youths with young bulls in the ceremonies of initiation is made at what is probably the greatest emotional crisis of a Nuer's life. Sheer terror of the ordeal they must pass through—for bravely though they face it ' they are all terrified in their hearts '—and the agonies they have to endure before the wounds are healed are succeeded by supreme happiness and elation at having entered the life of manhood so long looked forward to—the life of the herds, the favourite oxen, the spear, leisure, love-making and courtship, and singing and dancing.

Doubtless Professor Seligman's use of the word ' identification ' could be supported by other examples of what might be interpreted as symbolic behaviour. For instance, early in life Nuer remove their lower incisors and their jaws bear therefore a certain resemblance to those of cattle, which lack upper incisors. I have never heard Nuer say that they remove their teeth in order to look like cattle, only that they do not want to look like hyænas; and it might seem fanciful to cite this as a further exemplification of ' identification ' were it not that the Dinka suggest that they remove their teeth for that reason.<sup>1</sup> If we were to follow Professor Seligman we should, however, have to look below the level of conscious thought for the meaning of this

<sup>1</sup> Major G. W. Titherington, ' The Raik Dinka of the Bahr el Ghazal Province ', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1927, p. 205: ' the suggestion that as one row of front teeth is enough for a cow it ought to suffice a man was probably not serious '.



custom, in the symbolic processes of the unconscious in which knocking out teeth stands for castration<sup>1</sup>—a further illustration of ‘identification’ with the favourite ox.

Other examples might be mentioned and the matter might be discussed at great length—would, in fact, require a lengthy discussion were it to be fully treated—but I have given enough information, fringed with some speculation, to show the way Nuer express symbolically their relationship to their cattle. It is true, indeed, that one can easily imagine what is not there. Human thought and expression are inevitably constructed out of man’s experience of the world around him, and we do not necessarily have to seek for subliminal explanations for the images he employs. A person may speak of himself or herself as a dog, a bitch, a tortoise, a swine, a rabbit, and so on, without unconsciously, or even partially unconsciously, behaving, or imagining that he is behaving, as if he were one of these creatures. There is nothing that should surprise us in Nuer speaking metaphorically of boys by the same word (*ruath*) as they use for young bulls and for the male young of other animals, and of men by the same word (*tut*) as they use for adult bulls and adult males of other animal species. It is natural—it would be remarkable were it not so—that Nuer use their cattle as symbols in speech and gesture. Nevertheless, the evidence, some of which I have presented, suggests that there is more to it than that. However, I want to cut adrift from any psychological consideration of the matter. Whether Professor Seligman’s use of the word ‘identification’ is correct is a question which, being framed in psychological terms, poses a problem that lies outside both my own competence and the scope of this article. We are not concerned with individual psychological processes, which in the literature of psycho-analysis are generally also more or less abnormal, but with a moral identification, a participation imposed on the individual by his culture and inextricably bound up with religious values. When henceforward I speak of identification it is to be understood in this latter sense, and not in any psychological sense.

The strictly social character of the facts I have related does not require demonstration, but, before discussing their religious meaning, I must give a brief account of a symbolic usage which expresses the collective identification of clans and lineages with their herds. We have been discussing hitherto the equation of man with ox. Honorific titles of clans and lineages introduce us to the equation of the idea of a social group with the idea of the continuity of its ancestral herd.

On the day when, by the cutting of lines on his forehead, a boy becomes a man there is much rejoicing on the part of his kinsfolk, and especially of his father and paternal kin, and in talking to Nuer about events on this day they have impressed on me that what is uppermost in the minds of the older men, particularly at the initiation of an eldest son, is that the continuity of the family and lineage is now assured. Initiation is the threshold to marriage and the birth of sons who will remember their forbears, for as soon as the period of healing and seclusion is over the initiates embark on a full sex life leading to courtship, marriage, and begetting. An initiate is part of a lineage and clan and his initiation is seen in terms of its collective life. His new relationship with the cattle is then not only a personal one, important though that is, but the personal relationship is incorporated in a more general lineage one.

Nuer conceive of the ancestor of a clan, and likewise the ancestors of its component

<sup>1</sup> C. G. Seligman, ‘The Unconscious in Relation to Anthropology’, *The British Journal of Psychology*, xviii, 1928, pp. 382–7.

lineages, as having possessed a herd, the descendants of which have had, and continue to have, a constant relationship with the descendants of their original owners. This ancestral herd is no doubt a fiction, for the cattle are being constantly dispersed and replaced by others at marriages, but conceptually it is an enduring collectivity. There is ideally a constant attachment, the clan and its herd forming a joint community down the generations, so much so that a common, perhaps the commonest, explanation of a division in the clan is the fighting of the bulls of the ancestors of the divided parts. The social cleavage is represented in tradition as a cleavage in the herd.

The unity of clans and lineages is expressed in the names of the ancestral spears (to which I shall devote a separate article) and in honorific titles, chiefly derived from the names of cows, which symbolize the ancestral herds. In both cases we are dealing with ideas and not actual things, with the idea of a clan spear handed down as an heirloom and with the idea of the present herds of the members of the clans and lineages being descended from the ancestral herd; and the two ideas together express symbolically the unity of clan or lineage. Nuer say that '*mut kene paak jalke kel*', 'the spear and the honorific title go together'; if a man has a certain clan spear he must have one or more honorific titles which go with it. Both have come down together from *tuok nath*, the beginnings of the Nuer. The *paak*, a word found in most of the Nilotic languages,<sup>1</sup> may be described as an honorific title used as a mode of salutation or address. It is commonly used on ceremonial occasions, as on formal visits, at dances, and at marriage and initiation ceremonies. Otherwise it is mostly a complimentary usage which expresses a formal relationship of reserve, as from a mother-in-law to her son's wife, and then it is chiefly a woman's mode of address.

The title consists of *gat*, son (of), or *nya*, daughter (of), followed by a word which usually refers to a cow said to be the one on whose milk the ancestor of the clan or lineage was nurtured in infancy, though it may refer to the place where the clan or lineage is said to have originated, or to some object connected with the ancestor, or to his totem. Nuer sometimes say that clans either '*ba paak ka kwi yangdien*', 'are saluted by reference to their cow', or '*ba paak ka kwi ciengdien*', 'are saluted by reference to their (original) village site', but since the salutation generally refers to a cow the expressions '*paak*', 'honorific title', and '*paakene yang*', 'honorific title of cow', are used as synonyms. The words are often exceedingly difficult to translate, or even to discover the meaning of, especially when they relate to cows, for here the Nuer language proliferates symbolism in luxuriant elaborations of fancy; and representations of ancestral cow, ancestral home, totem, and totemic spirit, are sometimes fused in the titles, which are built out of a number of residues all of which derive from and express lineage values. I have listed and discussed some of these honorific titles elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> and there is no need here for a detailed consideration of them. We have only to note the central place the idea of a cow has in them, the cow standing for the herd and hence also for the lineage of its masters.

<sup>1</sup> In the languages of the Anuak and of the Luo of Kenya *paagha* and *paak* have much the same meaning as the Nuer word; in Shilluk the verb *pako* means 'to thank'; and in Lango the verb *pako* means 'to give a nickname of affection' (E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Political System of the Anuak*, 1940, p. 29; idem,

'Luo Tribes and Clans', *J. Rhodes-Livingstone Institute*, 1949, p. 31; D. Westermann, *The Shilluk People*, 1912, p. 277; J. H. Driberg, *The Lango*, 1923, p. 403).

<sup>2</sup> 'The Nuer: Tribe and Clan', *Sudan Notes and Records*, xvii, 1934, pp. 25-29.

It need not surprise us that it is a cow that is referred to and not an ox or bull. It would be inappropriate to refer to an ox since, as I understand the matter, the whole point of using a symbol from the herds is to express in a single representation the idea of the unity of a lineage and its cattle, the cattle which sustain the lineage by their milk (the cow suckles the ancestor) and by constant calving provide them with bridewealth for marriages, whereby sons are born and the lineage continued, and with a means of maintaining communication with God, both as the universal creative spirit and in the particular refraction or refractions by which he is figured to the lineage and its families, and with the ancestral ghosts. Male animals do not answer to the requirements of the symbolism. The great majority of the bulls are castrated, and, if not later disposed of in marriage, those which survive murrains are sacrificed; and the animals which are left entire are not thought of as being, like the male members of a human lineage, a line of descent. In tracing back the lineage of a beast, which Nuer can sometimes do to several generations, they do so by the points of the dams and not the points of the sires: an ox of certain markings was born of a cow of certain markings, and it of a cow of other markings. Descent in the herd is, so to speak, traced matrilineally; and it is the cows which are seen as the stable element, which calve cow-calves, which calve cow-calves in their turn, and so provide the constant and continuous nexus between herd and lineage. Consequently, if at marriage most of a herd is dispersed and only a core is retained, it is some cows which are kept so that the herd may be built up anew through them. Therefore, it is the cow of the ancestor, and not his bull, which furnishes the symbol of the continuity and solidarity of his descent and which is incorporated in the honorific titles of clans and lineages.

The lineage-herd equation can thus be considered as a structural expression of the man-ox equation. One does not derive from the other but they are parts of a single complex representation, which finds its most logical expression in the rite of sacrifice. The exordial words spoken at sacrifices of the obligatory kind are the spear-names of the clans of the speakers (when I say 'clan', 'clan or lineage' is to be understood). Thus a man of the Jinaca clan calls out '*mut gwara, mut gham*', 'spear of our fathers, spear of the thigh'. The sacrificial spear brandished in invocation represents the spear of the ancestor and hence the clan as a whole. The sacrifice is in the name of the clan, and the animal is speared by a *gwan buthni* (master of ceremonies) who officiates as its representative on behalf of one of its families. But, as we have noted, the name of the ox of the speaker may also be shouted out in sacrificial invocations, as '*thakda ma rol cara*', 'my black ox with the white foreleg'. The name of the ox stands for the name of the man, and the name of the spear, which goes together with the cow-name, representing the relation of the clan to its ancestral herd, stands for the clan. The two symbols, ox-name and spear-name, represent two aspects of the sacrificial relationship between men and cattle, the personal and the collective or, as I have put it earlier, the man-ox equation and the lineage-herd equation. One or the other aspect is emphasized according to the nature of the sacrifice.

If this conclusion requires demonstration to be acceptable, the basis of the demonstration will readily be granted: that the facts we have examined—the relationship of men to cattle in the favourite ox situation, in the ritual of initiation, in the cow symbol of clans and lineages, and so forth—show that we are dealing with relations

between men and cattle in a complex of thought and experience which includes something that lies outside the uses of cattle for food and bridewealth. This is expressed in the idea of equation or identification, an equivalence between men and cattle; and the only plane of social life on which there is anything that can be called equivalence is that on which men and cattle are things of the same order, so that one can be substituted for the other, namely, in sacrifice. In marriages and in settlements for homicide, in which cattle are paid in compensation for the loss of a daughter or son, they do not stand in the place of the daughter or son. They are rather a means by which replacement is brought about: of a woman (daughter) by a woman (wife) and of a man (the slain) by a man (a son born of a woman married with the cattle of homicide). It is only on the religious plane, in sacrifice, that there is identification, or, in other words, in relation to God. I cannot here discuss the general and particular meanings of Nuer sacrifices, but it can be said that the most common and typical sacrifices, whatever else they may also be, are substitutions of the lives of oxen for the lives of men. This is not only evident in what Nuer say but is indicated also in the rites themselves, and especially in the rite of consecration.

In sacrifice the animal is consecrated with ashes, has an invocation spoken over it, and is speared. What concerns us here is the *buk*, the consecration: the placing, and usually lightly rubbing, of ashes on its back. What is the meaning of this act? It is clear that it is a rite of consecration, the animal's life being thereby devoted to God; but in the most common sacrifices, the piacular ones, it is also sanctified for sacrifice in substitution for the life of a man. It would seem, therefore, that the laying of the right hand on the animal's back identifies the man who lays it, or the person on whose behalf he is acting, with the beast. I must confess that this is not an interpretation that I reached entirely by observation, but one taken over from studies of Hebrew and other sacrifices because it seems to make better sense than any other as an explanation of the Nuer facts. For the Nuer, the right hand stands for the whole person, and by placing it on the animal the officiant identifies himself with it. If this is so, then it is himself that he offers up; or, to put it in another way, in sacrifice the representations of man and ox are fused.

The suggestion that the placing of the hand on the ox in sacrifice is an identification of the officiant with the offering could nevertheless be discarded without vitally affecting the argument, for there is no doubt that in piacular sacrifices at any rate the ox is substituted for the man and that it is therefore possible to speak of a ritual equivalence between man and ox and, in this sense, of identification of man with ox. The interpretation of the laying on of the hand merely strengthens the idea of identification, but it is secondary and the idea by no means depends on it. The particular interpretation is subordinate to an explanation springing from the whole character of the sacrificial act.

It may be asked, however, how the fact that in piacular sacrifice *an* ox is substituted for *a* man affects the general relationship of men to cattle. The answer is that all cattle are reserved for sacrifice. It is not just that in a particular ceremony a particular ox stands for a particular man. The equivalence is a general one between a herd and its lineage of masters, and between men, as men, and cattle, as cattle.

The word used for the killing of a beast in sacrifice is *nak* and this is also the ordinary word for 'to kill', there being no special word to denote killing in sacrifice

which distinguishes that kind of killing from a killing in different circumstances—the killing of an animal for food or protection or the killing of a man in quarrel or feud. It was largely on account of a similar lack of verbal differentiation that Robertson Smith argued that among the Hebrews all slaughter was sacrifice until the code of Deuteronomy dissociated the two ideas of slaughter for food and killing for sacrifice.<sup>1</sup> In the case of the Nuer I do not think that it is of any great significance that the same word is used both for killing in sacrifice and for other killings. The mere act of killing is adequately covered by the same word, for in a sacrifice it is not the killing in itself which is important but the *kam yang*, the yielding of the animal to God.

Nevertheless, it is a fact that all cattle are reserved for sacrifice. Some caution is necessary here. Nuer are very fond of meat and whether an animal is killed in sacrifice or dies a natural death, its flesh is eaten. All cattle, sheep, and goats eventually go into the pot. Also, it is very noticeable that on ceremonial occasions, which are not also occasions of calamity, most people show more interest in the festal than in other aspects of the ceremonies. People show their desire for meat without reserve and it is the festal character of sacrifices which gives them much of their significance in the life of the Nuer. This is perhaps most noticeable at weddings, when, moreover, those who get the flesh are not those who sacrifice the animal; and also on those occasions when men scramble for meat. Further, Nuer themselves recognize that some men are too eager to sacrifice an ox, sheep, or goat on the slightest excuse, a craving for meat rather than a pressing need for spiritual aid being the incentive for sacrifice. However, the fact that Nuer accuse men of making unnecessary sacrifices to have a feast of meat in itself shows that animals should not be slaughtered except in sacrifice, and there is indeed a very strong feeling, amounting to a moral injunction, that domestic animals—sheep and goats as well as cattle, though it is only cattle I discuss here—must not be slaughtered except in sacrifice and, save in very special circumstances, they are never slaughtered for food, a fact noticed, and noted, by Ernst Marno nearly a century ago.<sup>2</sup> This injunction explains why Nuer are not expected to, and do not, provide meat for guests.

The very special circumstances in which cattle are killed for food are times of severe famine and in what are called *nak*, or in some parts of Nuerland *kanar* or *cuel*, camps. Within my own short experience, in 1931, a year of great hunger, the Lou Nuer killed many oxen for food, and during a famine in Western Nuerland in 1935 a great number of beasts were slaughtered to keep the people alive. Mr. Howell says that in the Zeraf valley in 1943, likewise a year of famine, animals were being killed for food.<sup>3</sup> The Lou Nuer even have a reputation, of which they are ashamed, for killing oxen when hungry, for not waiting, that is, till faced with starvation. How often this situation used to occur is not, and cannot, be known. If it is not altogether a modern phenomenon, we may suppose that it was much less likely to have arisen before rinderpest depleted the herds and imposed peace prevented their rehabilitation, the milk supply thus being lessened.<sup>4</sup>

*Nak* camps are presumably so called because they are formed for the express pur-

<sup>1</sup> *The Prophets of Israel*, 1902 ed., p. 368.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 348.

<sup>3</sup> P. P. Howell, 'The Age-Set System and the Institution of "Nak" among the Nuer' (with a

Note by E. E. Evans-Pritchard), *Sudan Notes and Records*, xxix, 1948, p. 180.

<sup>4</sup> E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*, 1940, pp. 19-20.

pose of killing (*nak*) oxen. They are formed in some years only, at the commencement of the dry season, by youths, each of whom takes an ox to the camp where one by one they are slaughtered and the young men gorge themselves on their flesh; though, since cattle have been scarcer, two youths may share a single animal, it being nevertheless felt that there ought to be an ox to a man. There is still some doubt about the precise significance of this custom. When I published an account of the Nuer age-set system<sup>1</sup> I considered that it did not form an integral part of the rites of initiation but was only incidentally connected with them. I may well have been wrong in this conclusion, and my own later researches revealed features which incline me to accept Mr. Howell's contention that they are a process in the age-set system.<sup>2</sup> Certainly there is more in the *nak* than merely killing oxen for feasting. That it has a ritual significance is clear from the fact that the youths who take part are segregated. Girls are not allowed to enter, or at any rate to sleep in, the camps. Abstinence is imposed at a time when the company of girls and their favours are a Nuer's chief interest. Nor may the young men attend dances, which therefore do not take place at this time. Also, they may have no contact of any kind with the herds other than with the oxen with which they are segregated. It is to be noted further that the borrowing from kin and neighbours of oxen for slaughter by youths whose families are unable to provide them with suitable animals is no ordinary loan but is of a peculiar and ritual character. The owner of a beast who is asked for it by a youth may not refuse the request, and not only for social reasons but also, says Mr. Howell, because 'he would run the risk of spiritual contamination resulting in sickness or even death among the members of his family'.<sup>3</sup> Nor may he demand repayment for some years. These facts, considered in the light of the great reluctance, to say the least of it, of the Nuer to kill an ox except for sacrifice, suggest strongly that slaughter on this scale has a religious significance that we have yet to discover. It is possible that further research may establish that the oxen are consecrated before being killed at these camps. It is significant that not only is the killing obligatory but also each youth ought to provide an ox for slaughter, an ox for a man, for we seem to have here again the equivalence of a man with an ox, which is the basis of peculiar sacrifice; and it can easily be seen that the death of an ox at the termination of the rites of initiation would be a sacramental act appropriate to the whole setting of initiation. This must be, however, a matter for further inquiry.

Except on those rare occasions when dire necessity or custom compel them to do so, Nuer do not kill cattle except in sacrifice and it is regarded as a fault to kill them otherwise. This is clearly shown, apart from the facts I have already instanced, by the statement that an ox slain simply from desire for meat may *cien* (curse) its slayer, for it has *cuong* (right) in the matter. Maybe the Nuer do not take this very seriously, but that they say it at all is an indication of how they regard the matter, for Nuer greatly fear *cien* and hold that it operates only because God is permissive, seeing that an injustice has been done. The man had no right to take the life of the ox and by doing so he committed a fault. In sacrificial invocations Nuer explain to God why the life of the ox is being taken, and they may also address the ox and tell it why it is being killed; not that they think it understands. They are justifying themselves in taking its

<sup>1</sup> 'The Nuer: Age-Sets', *Sudan Notes and Records*, xix, 1936.

<sup>2</sup> P. P. Howell, *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

life. Consequently I think it possible—I much regret that I did not inquire into the matter—that even when cattle are killed for food in times of famine something may be said to God, and perhaps to the oxen also, to excuse the act; and it may be that they are also consecrated before death. It would perhaps not be permissible to speak of such killings as sacrifice even were this so, for there might be no sacramental intention. Here again, further inquiry is required. What can, however, be said on our present knowledge is that, apart from animals devoted by formal acts of dedication or consecration, all cattle, and also sheep and goats, are reserved, or set apart, for sacrifice and their lives should not be taken, except in the special circumstances I have mentioned, for any other purpose; and in that sense we may speak of cattle as being ‘sacred’. If we do so, however, we must note that they are not sacrificed because they are regarded as ‘sacred’ intrinsically, or for reasons extraneous to the sacrificial situation, but, on the contrary, they are regarded as ‘sacred’ only because they are reserved for sacrifice and in the sense defined by that purpose.

Here, two points must be discussed. In sacrifices Nuer speak always of the offering as *yang*. In ordinary usage this word means ‘cow’ in contrast to *tut*, ‘bull’, or *thak*, ‘ox’, but it is also commonly used in a more general sense for any domestic bovine animal of either sex when what is intended is to indicate that it is a bovine beast and not an ovine or any other kind of beast, much as we speak of a ‘cow’ when the animal may in fact be a bull or a bullock. Hence one may speak of a bull as a *yang ma tut*, a male ‘cow’. The word is used in this more general sense in sacrificial invocations. The officiant says to God ‘*kene yangdu*’, ‘take thy cow’, whether it is a male or female beast. In fact, the animal is normally an ox. Nuer do not, except at mortuary ceremonies for senior persons, kill fertile cows and it is likely that a cow will have died a natural death before it is too old for calving. So generally it is only barren cows which are sacrificed, and they are regarded as equal to males, just as Nuer speak of a barren woman as having become a man. Since Nuer keep very few entire animals and do not kill them in sacrifice, unless they have become old and like oxen, one seldom finds an adult bull being sacrificed; and if a young male calf is required for sacrifice it is castrated before it is killed. One can therefore say—it is difficult otherwise to understand why a bull should be castrated before sacrifice—that the ideal sacrifice is that of an ox, that the sacramental equivalence in sacrifice is man with ox, though ‘ox’ may be regarded as representative of cattle as a whole and the broader meaning as equivalent of men with cattle.

We may therefore ask—and this is the second point to be discussed—how this conclusion can be accepted in view of the fact that it is more usually a beast of the flocks, a sheep or a goat, than a beast of the herds, an ox or a cow, that is, in practice, sacrificed. However, when goats and sheep are sacrificed they are always regarded as surrogates for cattle. They are not sacrificed in their own right, and a sheep or goat is therefore never referred to in sacrificial contexts as ‘sheep’ or ‘goat’ but always as ‘*yang*’, ‘cow’ (in the general sense of a bovine animal). In all important sacrifices an ox or cow must be the offering, and though in lesser sacrifices sheep and goats are offered instead, they are offered in the place of cattle, and were a man able to afford it he would offer only cattle. Since sheep and goats are sacrificial surrogates for cattle, they too may not be killed except in sacrifice, but there is this important difference: the sacrificial equivalence is always between *ran* and *yang*, man and cow

(bovine beast) and never between man and sheep or goat, even when it is a sheep or goat which is being killed; for even then the ideal equivalence is preserved in speech. The goat or sheep is an 'ox' in this context because it takes the place of an ox. God is asked to accept it as an ox. This is also the case even when a fruit, a lump of tobacco, a bead, or some other object is offered in sacrifice. The object is always referred to as a 'cow' (bovine beast) in the sacrificial situation and not by the word by which it is otherwise called, for in sacrifice these objects are regarded, like sheep and goats, as surrogates for cattle on occasions of small importance or in conditions of great urgency or poverty.

We may conclude therefore that the observations we have made earlier concerning the relationship of a man with his favourite ox, the ritual of initiation, and so forth, must be viewed in the light of the identification of men with cattle in sacrifices. A Nuer does not look upon his cattle as a stock-breeder or dairy farmer does, for his relationship to his beasts is complicated by their reservation for sacrifice. And it is not simply that he must not kill cattle except in sacrifice because, if he were to slaughter them for meat, he would lower his resources for food, marriage, and religious purposes. It is not merely a negative injunction. It is a positive injunction. It is not 'thou must not kill' but 'thou must sacrifice'. It is not that they must only kill for sacrifice but that they must sacrifice to kill.

We must not be led astray by this conclusion to suppose that in the everyday life of the Nuer they think of and treat their animals in a 'religious' manner. If we speak of them as being 'sacred' at all it is only in the very special sense of being reserved, or set apart, for sacrifice and not in the sense that they are revered or are thought to have in themselves any spiritual power. Nor do Nuer *thek* (respect) them, not even those dedicated to spirits. Ordinarily, Nuer think of them from the practical point of view of herdsmen who are largely dependent on them for food and are dependent on them entirely for marriage, as valuable and, as I have already said earlier, rather stupid, animals which require their constant attention. They treat those dedicated to spirits no differently from the rest of the herd. Their milk is used, though by members of the family only, like the milk of other cows; and many times I have seen a man slap such a cow on its rump when it was troublesome or slow.

Nor must it lead us to forget that the cattle provide milk, meat, and various other requirements of the practical life, and we are not likely to do so, as we very easily think of cattle in some such way ourselves; nor that they are a means of acquiring wives, validating marriage, and legitimatizing children, and here again it is not difficult to put ourselves to some extent at the stand-point of Nuer once their marriage and family arrangements have been described to us; nor that they confer status and prestige and that a certain kind of friendship and intimacy can obtain between man and beast; and this is also not unfamiliar to us. The Nuer themselves emphasize such uses, when speaking of their cattle, as what gives them value, makes them precious in their eyes, and we are therefore not likely to overlook them. Were we to underestimate their importance, we should fail also to understand one of the elements in sacrifice, to appreciate what it is a Nuer surrenders in sacrifice—the most precious thing he possesses. But even here we are not dealing with something entirely rational. Cows and oxen have not got an economic value, and they and their products are not sold at market. Nor is marriage a purchase. All sorts of personal interests, emotional



feelings, social sentiments, and social ties and traditions and customs are involved even on this level.

But it would be no less fatal a mistake to forget the religious significance cattle have for the Nuer. This is easier to do for two reasons. Firstly, because the Nuer are themselves most reticent in speaking of their cattle in this connexion. They tend to be reserved in discussing religious matters, and it may even be said that a certain secrecy adheres to them, and those whom a European tends to know best, the younger men, have less awareness of the sacramental role of cattle than the older people. This interest in cattle is less on the surface, less obvious. Secondly, because we have no direct experience of our own which associates animals with anything similar in our culture. We are, therefore, inclined to reason that cattle have a ritual significance because they have a great practical value. If this were really so the cow, and not the ox, would be the object of identification; but, apart from that consideration, an attempt to interpret the religious importance of cattle on this one-way track of reasoning changes the whole character of the relationship between men and cattle. It makes the animals themselves to be in some way the object of religious attention, and nothing could be further from the truth.

The religious significance of cattle is of a very different kind. Cattle are necessary to Nuer not only for food and marriage but also for salvation, for the sanctification of their social undertakings, and for overcoming evil in its twofold character of sickness and sin. As Professor Westermann's text has it, 'She [the cow] was ordered [by God] for the deliverance of souls'.<sup>1</sup> This soteriological function pertains to cattle as much as do their economic, bridewealth, and other functions. It is not just that, in Nuer sacrifices, something that for other reasons is valuable obtains, through its consecration and sacramental death, a religious significance, which would consequently be secondary and momentarily derived from the immediate sacrificial act. The sacrificial role is always dormant in cattle, which in sacrifice are being used for an ordained purpose for which they are set apart; and their religious significance is therefore intrinsic and primary. This is why the rubbing of ashes on an ox's back while uttering some short prayer or invocation is a rite which can at any time be performed. The animal is already destined for sacrifice. The sacrificial situation is present, as it were, in the act, though no actual sacrifice is made.

I am not suggesting that Nuer have the sacrificial character of their cattle always in mind. They clearly do not. Nor do they have any other bovine function always in mind, their milk or meat value for example. When Nuer look at their cattle they no more think of butter and boiled beef than we do when we look at a herd of grazing cows. But the sacrificial situation is always present in potentiality and intention and it is this which makes all the difference between the mentality of any merely dairy and stock-farming people and the cattle-mentality of the Nuer. Some effort of the imagination is necessary to put ourselves in the place of the Nuer in this respect. All the great social occasions of their lives are occasions of sacrifice, and every grave danger and misfortune which comes their way is met with sacrifice; and in sickness, especially, the lives of their oxen stand between them and death. Their salvation at every crisis depends on the small herd with which they share their home. When, therefore, we seek to estimate what their cattle are to Nuer and how they see them, it

<sup>1</sup> 'The Nuer Language', *Mitt. des Sem. für Orient. Sprachen*, 1912, pp. 116-17.

would be fatal not to recognize that among other things they are the means by which men can enter into communication with God and obtain by prayer and sacrifice that divine aid without which they are helpless, and especially and on all critical occasions by sacrifice; for, as Father Crazzolaro puts it, cattle form 'the link between the perceptible and the transcendental' (*das Bindemittel zwischen der sinnlichen und übersinnlichen Welt*).<sup>1</sup> His cattle, in fulfilling this role, shield a man and his family from disaster, and he conceives of them also collectively as a herd which from the beginning of time has helped his fathers in distress, performing in each generation the same sacrificial service. In the time of the ancestor of his clan the 'cow' gave her life for his salvation and so it is with his descendants today and so it will be with their descendants tomorrow. Whence springs the identification of man with ox, of lineage with herd, and of men with cattle.

#### NOTE

A résumé of this paper was delivered to the Fourth International Congress for Anthropology and Ethnology held in Vienna in 1952. It forms a section of a general account of Nuer religion, some parts of which have already been, or are about to be, published. They are listed below in logical, not chronological, order.

- 'Some Features of Nuer Religion', *J.R.A.I.*, lxxxi, 1951.
- 'A Note on Nuer Prayers', *Man*, 1952, 140.
- 'The Nuer Spirits of the Air', *Ann. Lateranensi*, in press.
- 'The Nuer *Col Wic*', *Man*, 1949, 2.
- 'Nuer Totemism', *Ann. Lateranensi*, xiii, 1949.
- 'The Nuer Conception of Spirit in its Relation to the Social Order', *American Anthropologist*, in press.
- 'Burial and Mortuary Rites of the Nuer', *African Affairs*, 1949.
- 'Nuer Curses and Ghostly Vengeance', *Africa*, xix, 1949.
- 'Two Nuer Ritual Concepts', *Man*, 1949, 96.
- 'Some Features and Forms of Nuer Sacrifices', *Africa*, xxi, 1951.

<sup>1</sup> P. P. Crazzolaro, 'Die Bedeutung des Rindes bei den Nuer', *Africa*, vii, 1934, p. 320.

#### Résumé

#### LE RÔLE DU BÉTAIL DANS LES RITES DU SACRIFICE PARMI LES NUER

BEAUCOUP d'auteurs ont noté les relations spéciales qui existent entre certains peuples nilotiques et leur bétail; quelques-uns ont suggéré que ce rapport a une qualité religieuse et que le bétail est vénéré comme un objet sacré. Dans son article traitant de la signification religieuse du bétail pour les Nuer, l'auteur admet que les emplois, tant pratiques qu'économiques, du bétail pour les besoins de la nourriture, du prix de la fiancée, de l'octroi de prestige, etc., ne devraient pas être négligés. Cependant, il signale qu'il y a un sens dans lequel on pourrait dire que les Nuer s'identifient avec leurs bœufs, et ceci est tout particulièrement vrai pour le bœuf qu'un jeune homme reçoit de son père lors de son initiation. Cet animal, dont il reçoit son 'nom de bœuf' ('ox-name'), devient non seulement sa possession la plus précieuse mais lui donne un moyen par lequel il entre en rapports spéciaux avec Dieu et les esprits de ses ancêtres. Néanmoins, il serait plus exact de dire qu'un homme Nuer ne s'identifie pas tellement avec un bœuf déterminé qu'avec la conception d'un bœuf. Un

parallèle est établi entre l'homme et le bœuf qui est exprimé par certaines caractéristiques des rites de l'initiation et dans plusieurs actions symboliques et titres de politesse. De plus, les clans et les lignées sont identifiées collectivement avec leurs troupeaux, la conception d'un groupement social étant mise en parallèle avec l'idée de la continuité du troupeau des ancêtres du groupe, bien que les bêtes qui constituent ce troupeau soient constamment dispersées et remplacées par d'autres. Le rapport entre le clan et le troupeau de ses ancêtres est exprimé par des titres honorifiques qui, généralement, comprennent quelque allusion à une vache (la vache représentant le troupeau). Les identifications d'un homme avec un bœuf et d'un clan avec un troupeau trouvent leur expression logique dans les rites du sacrifice, au cours desquels le bétail remplace les hommes. Ceci est clairement défini dans les termes de l'invocation et dans les rites, spécialement les rites de consécration, dans lesquels l'identification de l'homme qui accomplit le sacrifice (ou de la part duquel ce sacrifice est fait) avec l'animal faisant l'objet du sacrifice, est complète. Mais le fait que, théoriquement, tout le bétail est réservé pour les rites du sacrifice et ne devrait pas être tué pour d'autres buts, porte plus loin le parallélisme entre l'homme et le bœuf pour englober un rapport général entre hommes et bétail.

Un bœuf est l'animal sacrificatoire par excellence, et même lorsque des moutons, des chèvres et d'autres objets, tels que le tabac, sont offerts, la cérémonie du sacrifice est toujours désignée par une expression qui veut dire ' bétail '.

Il se peut que l'abattage de bœufs dans les camps *nak* et leur consommation par un groupe de jeunes gens, qui sont tenus isolés et empêchés d'avoir aucun contact avec les troupeaux, comportent une signification rituelle et un rapport quelconque avec l'initiation, mais ce sujet exige une étude plus approfondie.

En ce qui concerne les Nuer, le bétail est un moyen de salut, par lequel ils peuvent entrer en communication avec Dieu et obtenir, par le sacrifice, l'aide divine et sa protection contre le mal.

## *Notice to Members*

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ST. DUNSTAN'S CHAMBERS,

10-11 FETTER LANE, FLEET STREET, E.C. 4

*Telephone:* CENTRAL 4751, 4752

*Please address all communications as above.*

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