JASO 27/1 (1996): 21–45

FROM THE ARCHIVES

A GLIMPSE OF EVANS-PRITCHARD THROUGH HIS CORRESPONDENCE WITH LOWIE AND KROEBER

Selected and Introduced by
PIERO MATTHEY

Introduction

WHILE scholars have always differed in the ways they handled their personal papers, the emergence of computers, fax machines and, above all, electronic mail has considerably altered the documentation of academic work. Historians and biographers will almost certainly regret the end of the era in which letters were either typed or written by hand. In the past, there were scholars who systematically filed their incoming mail, along with carbon copies of their outgoing letters. Whether this happened by plan or by chance, invaluable material became available for historical research, once these files reached a public archive. Of course, there were always those who, lacking storage space or an eye for history, or having the more deliberate aims of privacy and confidentiality, destroyed some or all of the papers in their possession. The mediaeval historian Ernst Kantorowicz, for example, who taught at Berkeley in the 1940s, sometimes went so far as to ask his colleagues to destroy his letters once they had been answered. No trace whatsoever was to remain (Professor Yakov Malkiel, personal communication).

But as a general rule, the decision to destroy records is restricted to what is in one's own hands. One cannot eliminate what has become the property of others. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, for example, decided not to leave certain kinds of information to succeeding generations, and, during the last years of his life, apparently disposed of every item of correspondence in his personal papers (Dr

Godfrey Lienhardt, personal communication). Yet in 1952 he saw fit to publish the English translation of a letter in French which had been sent to him by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl in November 1934. The letter was Lévy-Bruhl's reply to Evans-Pritchard upon receiving a copy of the latter's essay, 'Lévy-Bruhl's Theory of Primitive Mentality', published the same year, while Evans-Pritchard was Assistant Professor of Sociology at Fuad I University in Cairo. In a brief introduction, Evans-Pritchard argued that making the letter public was important because it had a bearing on the understanding of Lévy-Bruhl's thought at precisely the time the French scholar was revising views he had elaborated in earlier works, including *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (1910). Lévy-Bruhl's letter to Evans-Pritchard reflected on the criticism his work had received during the previous twenty-five years, and hinted at those reformulations of his earlier theories which would not be made explicit until the posthumous publication of the *Carnets* in 1949. Moreover, wrote Evans-Pritchard, the letter demonstrated that the French scholar had been 'tolerant, open-minded, and courteous,' showing virtues not always possessed in academia.[1]

Since Evans-Pritchard destroyed the correspondence in his possession, any surviving material found elsewhere assumes great importance. It may shed light on his personality, both as a scholar and as a human being, suggest missing signposts to his own intellectual itinerary and to those of his colleagues in anthropology, and provide the context needed to avoid misinterpreting statements which would otherwise remain elusive and ambiguous. T. O. Beidelman, for example, has drawn a fascinating portrait of Evans-Pritchard, thanks to excerpts from letters he received from the British anthropologist over a period of many years (1974: 553–67).

I have accordingly brought together here the letters that Alfred L. Kroeber and Robert H. Lowie exchanged with Evans-Pritchard. Together, they provide a picture of the intermittent but continuing dialogue between the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, and Oxford University. Evans-Pritchard's originals have been matched up with outgoing carbon copies preserved by both Kroeber and Lowie.[2] Some of the letters are short and deal only with routine matters (which may nevertheless be of interest). But others contain important nuggets of information and offer an exciting view of anthropol-

1. Evans-Pritchard made the same point in Lévy-Bruhl's obituary (1940a: 24–5). The article was a grand tribute to a scholar who had consistently proved himself an outstanding thinker while continuing to embody remarkable human qualities.

2. The material comes from the Alfred L. Kroeber Papers (C–B 925, Boxes 6 & 14), the Robert H. Lowie Papers (C–B 927, Box 7) and the records of the Department of Anthropology, University Archives (CU–23, Box 17). For permission to publish, grateful acknowledgment is here made to the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley; Dr Deirdre Evans-Pritchard, daughter of E. E. Evans-Pritchard; and Professor Karl Kroeber, son and literary executor of Alfred L. Kroeber. To Mrs Lorise C. Topliffe of Exeter College, Oxford, go my profound thanks for providing essential information included here.

ogy and anthropologists on both sides of the Atlantic. I highlight some of the important points below.

Evans-Pritchard graduated in Modern History from Oxford University in 1924 with second-class honours. Later the same year, he moved to the London School of Economics to study anthropology, as it was the only institution which would allow him to conduct fieldwork. Unlike Sir James Frazer, he had always dreamt of an adventurous life in the field. As Evans-Pritchard entered the world of Seligman and Malinowski (who were on the teaching staff), Robert H. Lowie, who had left his native Vienna in 1893 at the age of ten, returned to the Old World for the first time. At the end of June 1924, he sailed to Europe, mainly to attend the International Congress of Americanists in Göteborg, Sweden, that August. But in the weeks preceding and following that event, he visited Scandinavia, Germany, Austria, France and England before sailing home from Southampton in November. While in London, he met Malinowski, with whom he felt an immediate intellectual kinship. They remained close until Malinowski's death in 1942, despite the profound differences in their understanding and practice of anthropology. Lowie also met Evans-Pritchard during his visit to the London School of Economics.

Oddly enough, in the 1920s neither of the foremost exponents of British functionalism, Malinowski in England and Radcliffe-Brown in South Africa, had a book of his own which covered the entire gamut of problems involved in kinship and social organization. The only outstanding work available was Lowie's *Primitive Society* (1920). In Cape Town, this was one of the books that Radcliffe-Brown recommended to his first-year students, as did Malinowski in London. Hortense Powdermaker, who entered the London School of Economics in the autumn of 1925, remembers that it was neither Boas nor Kroeber but Lowie whom Malinowski considered his 'favorite American anthropologist' (1966: 41).[3] Along with fellow students Evans-Pritchard, Firth and Schapera, her London experience was based on *Primitive Society*, and it is reasonable to assume that it played an important role in Malinowski's seminars.

The impact of *Primitive Society* on Evans-Pritchard was a lasting one. In a paper published during the early 1970s (Evans-Pritchard 1973), he acknowledged the magnitude of the intellectual debt he owed to Lowie. When he was about to travel to Nuerland in 1930 and needed to keep personal belongings to a minimum, a discussion with Max Gluckman led Evans-Pritchard to conclude that if he could take just one book with him, it would be Lowie's *Primitive Society*. Thanks to *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*, not much could be achieved in the area of fieldwork. In retrospect, Evans-Pritchard considered that 'It was a very good choice' (1973: 12). The profoundly felt words of sympathy which Evans-Pritchard sent to Lowie's widow upon receiving the news of his death (see letter no. 18

3. Similarly, while Schapera was studying under Radcliffe-Brown in South Africa, he was advised by his mentor to study under Malinowski in London. The only other suggestion was to study in the United States under Lowie, judged the only competent American social anthropologist. No mention was made of either Boas or Kroeber (Kuper 1973: 90–1).

below) are the best testimony that could be paid to the American anthropologist by his British colleague. In that letter, Evans-Pritchard says that it was Seligman who recommended *Primitive Society* to him, and in fact Seligman and Malinowski shared the same opinion of the book.

Because of the geographical distance involved (Evans-Pritchard was in Africa before and during the Second World War, and otherwise in England), it was difficult or impossible for the two men to remain in close contact. They kept in touch in the only sensible way—by paying attention to what each other published. On 14 November 1938, in a letter to Dr Harry Alpert, Lowie mentioned 'the unequivocally excellent field work reports of the last ten years by, say, Blackwood, Evans-Pritchard, Birket-Smith, Rasmussen, Lesser, Spier, *et al.*' (CU–23, Univ. of California Archives). Just a few years after their encounter in London, Evans-Pritchard thought of Lowie when he was planning a Festschrift in honour of Seligman. Ultimately, it was edited by Evans-Pritchard, Firth, Malinowski and Schapera.[4] Lowie accepted the invitation and provided a paper on 'Religious Ideas and Practices of the Eurasiatic and North American Areas' (1934: 183–8), a topic of great interest to Boas, who was always anxious to establish ancient Asian cultural relationships with the American continent. (A junior Boasian, Melville J. Herskovits, also appears among the contributors.)

Evans-Pritchard's high esteem for Lowie is further demonstrated by the fact that he asked his American colleague for a letter of recommendation (see letter no. 4 below) when the Readership in Social Anthropology at Oxford University became available (Marett, said Evans-Pritchard, was leaving 'almost at once'). Academic positions in England were rather limited at that time, and Evans-Pritchard definitely wanted to settle down and to devote his time to publishing the results of his prolonged fieldwork in various parts of the Sudan.

Once again, the situation is more complicated than it appears from Evans-Pritchard's letter. He apparently resigned from Cairo University not because of his frustration with the situation there (see letter no. 2 below), but because he was offered a chance to conduct fieldwork among the pagan Galla in Ethiopia in 1935. Unfortunately, the Italians invaded Ethiopia that year and no such research was possible. Evans-Pritchard had no choice at that point but to return to England, where he was given a research lectureship in African sociology at Oxford through Marett's good offices (Barnes 1987: 453). This appointment seems to have been no more than a temporary arrangement, designed to fill a gap and provide Evans-

4. Malinowski had asked Firth to join the project in order to avoid having his name close to that of Evans-Pritchard, with whom he was clearly at loggerheads. The complexities of the issue can be surmised from Firth's recollections of the episode, which occurred in 1934, the same year the book appeared (Firth 1981: 121–2). It is interesting to note that on 'the list of those who have promised to contribute (a copy of which is enclosed)' (see letter no. 1 below), the wording is 'Edited by Prof. B. Malinowski, D.Sc., Dr. I. Schapera, and E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Esq.' The editors are not listed in alphabetical order, as they are in the published volume. As Seligman's colleague, Malinowski is understandably listed first, followed by Schapera. Evans-Pritchard has put himself last, and further humbled himself as 'Esq.'

Pritchard with some respite. Marett was surely sympathetic to Evans-Pritchard, whom he had known since his days as an honorary Scholar at Exeter College (Marett 1941: 267–8, 309).

It is rather strange that in November 1935 Evans-Pritchard should tell Lowie that Marett was suddenly vacating his readership, since Marett would reach seventy the following June and would only then become due to retire from the post he had held since 1910. Nowhere in his autobiography does Marett mention having left the readership suddenly. Moreover, Evans-Pritchard knew that *Custom is King* (Buxton 1936), a volume of essays in Marett's honour, would be presented to him by his friends and pupils on the very day of his seventieth birthday; Evans-Pritchard himself contributed a paper entitled 'Daily Life of the Nuer in Dry Season Camps' (1936: 291–9). What impact Lowie's testimonial of 2 December 1935 (see letter no. 5) may have had is unknown. To whom did Evans-Pritchard give it? There is no record of a committee having been appointed to find a suitable successor to Marett. Only archival research at Oxford could possibly shed light on the situation there in late 1935 and early 1936.

Further confusion arises from the fact that the Readership in Social Anthropology at Oxford was upgraded to a professorship following Marett's departure. Marett says that he came close to being appointed Professor of Social Anthropology at the very last minute, the Chair having been established in 1934 (1941: 269). Either Marett was in error or the date is a misprint, accepted uncritically by Ruel (1968: 566). Barnes dates this event to 1936 (1987: 454). Records in the University of Oxford Calendar put us on a firmer ground in regard to the sequence of events following the creation of the Chair in 1937. A board of selection decided in favour of Radcliffe-Brown, who was then at Chicago. A note from Marett to Radcliffe-Brown dated 17 June 1937 informs us about the transfer of power.

Evans-Pritchard had to wait nearly a decade to succeed Radcliffe-Brown, who retired in July 1946. The Second World War intervened, leading to Evans-Pritchard's long absence from his own country. But the war also offered him a unique opportunity to realize his dream of returning to Africa. His residence at Cairo University in the early 1930s had allowed him to acquire fluency in Arabic, to tour the Egyptian desert, visit its scattered oases, and meet some of the Sanusi exiles from Libya. During the war, he was able to travel into the interior of Cyrenaica and to gain first-hand experience of its Bedouin tribes. The defeat of combined Italian and German forces at El Alamein in November 1942 resulted in Libya coming under British control for the third (and last) time. As Tribal Affairs Officer, Evans-Pritchard spent the following two years travelling extensively by camel and horse in the desert, steppe and forest of the plateau.

Out of that experience came *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (1949). Because of the post-war paper shortage in England, the text was reduced by half for the published version. While the original full text has apparently been lost, the work none the less stands as a very important milestone in Evans-Pritchard's personal career, as well as in the development of British social anthropology. In this respect, the treatments that Douglas and Barnes give the book are unsatisfactory. Douglas

deals at length with Evans-Pritchard's works on the Zande and Nuer, but devotes only two pages to the Sanusi (1980: 44–5). Barnes mentions it briefly as the product of Evans-Pritchard's sojourn in Cyrenaica during the war. Against this, attention should be paid to Evans-Pritchard's letter to Kroeber dated 26 February 1950 (letter no. 11 below). Writing to a 'historically minded' anthropologist like himself, Evans-Pritchard tells Kroeber what that book meant to him and, consequently, how it should be approached. Evans-Pritchard's inner feelings, and the goal he set for himself in writing the book, are made explicit in a single sentence: 'It is an anthropologist's attempt to write political history.' And the emphasis is definitely on 'history'.

Why (if we are to believe Evans-Pritchard) was the book treated so lightly by his colleagues? Here we enter the treacherous terrain of personal relationships and the attendant gossip which continues long after its subjects are dead and unable to contest it. Neither Evans-Pritchard nor his supposed detractors, Fortes and Radcliffe-Brown, can tell us anything now. We have to rely on their books and essays, supplemented, where possible, by unpublished papers. To the best of my knowledge, neither Fortes nor Radcliffe-Brown ever wrote what Evans-Pritchard attributes to them (see letter no. 11). Fortes was Evans-Pritchard's closest colleague, bound by a friendship that began in Malinowski's seminars at the London School of Economics and lasted until Evans-Pritchard's death in 1973. In 1971, in fact, Evans-Pritchard rebuked a commentator who suggested that there had been a clash between him and Fortes (Barnes 1987: 477).

It is difficult to imagine that a balanced scholar like Fortes would dismiss *The Sanusi* as 'mere literature'. Whatever one's personal bent, the book impresses the reader at once as a work based on solid historical research, beginning with a careful reconstruction of the life of the Grand Sanusi from his birth in Algeria in 1787 until his death in the oasis of Jaghbub in 1859. The narrative then shifts to the fortunes of the Sanusiya Order in North Africa and its emergence among the nomads of Cyrenaica. Tracing the relationships of this religious order first with the Turks and then with the invading Italians, who waged war against the Bedouin, Evans-Pritchard demonstrates how it ultimately became a politically unifying force. Similarly, one has to take issue with Radcliffe-Brown's alleged assessment of *The Sanusi* as 'diachronic sociology'. Evans-Pritchard was by no means unique among anthropologists in his habit of distorting the viewpoints of his colleagues in order to bring his own into sharper relief. Neither Fortes nor Radcliffe-Brown had the training in history Evans-Pritchard had received at Oxford, and neither had the sense of history that ran in his blood. It is not unreasonable to suspect that in his letter to Kroeber, he highlighted what he believed he had achieved in *The Sanusi* at the expense of Fortes and Radcliffe-Brown.

If there were any doubts about the nature of his book, Evans-Pritchard forcibly dispelled them in 1961, when he delivered the 'Anthropology and History' lecture at Manchester. 'One of the few genuinely historical books written by an anthropologist *de carrière*', he told his audience, 'is my own book *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*' (1961: 13). Its uniqueness is clearly seen in any comparison with other

books dealing with similar topics and problems. Evans-Pritchard published three works in 1940, all of them dealing with political institutions. The subtitle of *The Nuer* is *A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (1940b). His investigations among the Anuak were published in *The Political System of the Anuak of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (1940c). And, together with Fortes, he edited *African Political Systems* (1940), whose introduction so profoundly influenced British anthropology for many years to come.[5] That same year Evans-Pritchard's paper on 'The Political Structure of the Nandi-speaking Peoples of Kenya' appeared in the journal *Africa* (1940d).

Even in 1971, when his essays on the Azande were collected as *The Azande: History and Political Institutions*, Evans-Pritchard did not view this work as equal to that on the Sanusiya. The reason is clear: in writing about the Zande, Nuer, Anuak and Shilluk, he had relied on data collected during his own fieldwork, as well as those collected by others, and compared them with available European sources. He did not always put the material under the microscope of his sharp historical eye and at times accepted reports uncritically (cf. Johnson 1981: 508–27). In the Sudan, however, he had studied peoples whose language was spoken but not written, whose societies lacked archives of any kind and who possessed a limited interest in their own past. While the Dinka and Nuer were excellent examples of a segmentary system, the Ambomu, led by the Avongara ruling clan, had subjugated a variety of foreign peoples with different cultures and imposed upon them their own institutions and language. Several kingdoms had evolved out of the Zande expansion. Their oral traditions spanned a much deeper period of time, and their concern for events of the past was much more pronounced than among the Nilotes, who in fact practised a kind of built-in amnesia, remembering no more than the most recent five or six age-sets. Anything that happened earlier was systematically forgotten.

The events of the war led Evans-Pritchard from Egypt to Palestine, Syria and Iraq, and provided him with a wider and deeper sense of Arab civilization, which included a well-known history and an elaborate written literature spanning several centuries. Evans-Pritchard's love of poetry (both recited and written) was thoroughly satisfied. He enjoyed the refined and outstanding artistic achievements found in cities from Cairo to Jerusalem, Damascus to Baghdad. A historian found himself suddenly plunged into a fascinating history. *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* is much more than the accurate reconstruction of the personal vicissitudes of its founder. In a way, the focus is on the founding of the Mother Lodge of the Sanusiya Order on the plateau of Cyrenaica by the Grand Sanusi in 1843. Evans-Pritchard shows how the Order planted its roots among people who were already Muslim, rather than infidels to be converted.

The Order's foreign origin allowed it to stand outside the tribal system and therefore to arbitrate disputes when they arose in the highly segmentary political

5. It appears that Fortes may have been the sole author of the introduction, and that Evans-Pritchard merely subscribed his name to it (Barnes 1987: 461).

structure of the Bedouin. As time went on, it became both a political movement and a national symbol. While this process had begun under the Turkish administration, it reached its height in 1911 when Italy, a foreign, Christian country, captured Libya from the Ottoman Empire. It was the intervention of an outside force that caused all the segments of the society to coalesce in the face of a common danger from across the Mediterranean. Blending the common religious faith with a profound sense of Bedouin patriotism, the Sanusiya acquired a greater and greater political character. The second Italo-Sanusi war (1923–32) was even more decisive from this viewpoint than the first (1911–17). The Bedouin were defeated by the overwhelming power of the Italians, their country was desolated, and the losses in life and livestock were staggering, but an Islamic fraternity had become a political organization and laid down the embryonic foundations of a state.

When the Second World War brought an end to the Italian presence in Libya, the British authorities understandably looked to the Sanusiya as the future source of authority in the country. Evans-Pritchard himself had hoped that the Bedouin's long struggle would result in the independence of Cyrenaica (1949: 196). The situation had still not been settled when his book was published, but in 1951 the United Kingdom of Libya was finally proclaimed, and Sayyid Idris, the Sanusi leader, became its first monarch. After studying the kingdom of the Azande and the acephalous society of the Nuer, Evans-Pritchard had the opportunity to demonstrate how a *state* could evolve out of a *stateless* society.

And he did so in a very considerate and balanced way. His indignation in response to the military operations conducted against the Bedouin is expressed with restraint, letting the facts speak for themselves. His admiration goes to those who fought for their country against overwhelming odds and who gave up their lives rather than live under a foreign yoke. Where the Italians disparaged them as *ribelli*, he calls them 'patriots' (1949: 161). I do not see how one can agree with Douglas's reading of *The Sanusi* (1980: 44–5). In her view, Evans-Pritchard's 'sympathy for guerrilla herdsmen, their courage and conviction, illumines his own academic vendettas'. While Barnes deals at length with Evans-Pritchard's relations with Radcliffe-Brown, Malinowski and Fortes, at least he does so on the basis of accurate documentation, avoiding the sort of oblique hints and ambiguous allusions which simply baffle the reader unacquainted with the details of British social anthropology. Douglas is well-informed in such matters, but she provides no evidence to support her statement.

Evans-Pritchard's writings demonstrate how greatly he differed from contemporary British social anthropologists. His approach to the peoples he studied was comprehensive, covering as many fields as possible, even when he knew there was not enough time to cover everything. In a letter of November 1934 to Fortès, he acknowledged that he had 'jettisoned language and material culture since something had to go or I should have had a fit with overwork' (Barnes 1987: 473). In any case, an anthropologist should be above all a good ethnographer, that is to say, a conscientious gatherer of data, irrespective of the use he might one day make of them or how trivial they might seem to others (1951:

80). Evans-Pritchard published papers on subjects ranging from native texts to string figures, and he did not ignore rock carvings at oases in the desert of western Egypt.

Barnes has sensibly pointed out that a good deal of caution is necessary when evaluating Evans-Pritchard's writings. It is tempting but dangerous to take certain passages at face value. He often seemed to contradict himself within a short space of time, and the location of a public lecture sometimes influenced what he was saying. 'Anthropology and History' was delivered at Manchester, after all, not Oxford. A useful comparison can be made between his letter to Kroeber of 19 September 1950 (letter no. 15 below), in which he mentions British anthropology's 'total neglect of culture', and the lectures he delivered during the winter of 1950 at the request of the BBC (published in 1951 as *Social Anthropology*). Kroeber's *The Nature of Culture* could not fail to interest him the following year (see letter no. 16).

I come now to the issue raised by Evans-Pritchard in a letter to Kroeber (no. 20) and in Kroeber's reply (no. 21): the relationship between a scholar's religious faith, if any, and the way he writes about religion. Obviously, the question also has to do with Evans-Pritchard himself and the frequent speculation on how his conversion from the Church of England to Roman Catholicism may have affected his writing on religious matters, particularly in *Nuer Religion* (1956). Leach refers to unknown commentators, 'cynics', to whom the natives appeared like 'first-class Jesuit dialecticians' (1980: 24). Fortes sees a difference between the work on Zande witchcraft, carried out by an 'agnostic observer', and the study of Nuer religion, with its emphasis on their belief in Spirit (*Kwoth*). Involved here is Evans-Pritchard's 'theistic religious commitment' (1980: vii). Firth maintains that Evans-Pritchard 'allowed his natural interest in religion to prejudge a number of his findings' (1993: 213). Apparently Evans-Pritchard's colleagues considered his conversion to Roman Catholicism a turning-point in his life, after which he interpreted religious matters quite differently. But is there any convincing proof of this?

Evans-Pritchard acknowledged two attempts to enter the Roman Catholic Church prior to 1944, when he formally adopted the faith at the cathedral of Benghazi—paradoxically not in England, but in a church built in Cyrenaica under the Italian occupation. I find it very strange that no questions have been raised in regard to his writing of *The Sanusi*, completed long before *Nuer Religion*. There is no specifically Roman Catholic bias in the work on the Sanusiya Order. The Bedouin saw their fight not only as a desperate attempt to maintain their independence, but also as a *jihad*, or holy war against Christian infidels. When Enver Pasha sent Bedouin boys to be educated in Turkey in 1912, they were greeted as the offspring of Cyrenaican *mujahidin*, fighting for their faith (1949: 111–16). Evans-Pritchard succeeded admirably in portraying this attitude without letting his religious beliefs intrude.

In 1940–42, as the fighting between Italian and British troops in Cyrenaica shifted backwards and forwards, British soldiers trapped behind the front line were

hidden and nourished by the Bedouin, who provided precious and continuous assistance. Significantly, Evans-Pritchard made the following comment: 'It must not be forgotten that we are Christians and strangers and that the Bedouin have no obligation to us' (1945: 77). With great impartiality, he saw 'the Italian colonial record to be [not] very different from the records of other Colonial Powers'. He was aware of the contradictions in the colonial policies of all European countries (1949: iv, 211). To him, the Old World looked like an octopus, and one of its tentacles had got hold of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. It 'belonged to the same beast which held half the world in its clutches'. At stake was not so much the fate of a group of nomads, but the very future of Europe itself (ibid.: 116). The issue had to be understood in moral terms and not simply with regard to spheres of political influence or the division of spoils.

Furthermore, why did Evans-Pritchard claim to have learned more 'about the nature of God and our human predicament from the Nuer' than from a Christian country like England? In a lecture, which Fortes attended, Evans-Pritchard argued that there was basically no difference between the mystical experience of Hindus, Buddhists and adherents of the three monotheistic religions (Barnes 1987: 478–80). Jews, Christians and Muslims worship the same God, he seemed to be saying, albeit in different ways.

In the end, it is impossible truly to enter other people's lives. To understand them at all we must rely on what they say, provided that they have spoken with sincerity and are approached by us without prejudice. The letters of Evans-Pritchard, Kroeber and Lowie help us in trying to understand them and contribute to a more balanced appraisal of them. It is worthwhile mentioning an impromptu and frank evaluation of Evans-Pritchard volunteered by Edmund Leach in 1987 as we studied a sketch of Meyer Fortes hanging in a corridor at King's College, Cambridge. He praised Fortes' scholarly achievements, then added, 'But Evans-Pritchard was the brightest of us all'. His words still ring in my mind.

References

Barnes, John A. 1987. 'Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard, 1902–1973', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol. LXXIII, pp. 447–90.

Beidelman, Thomas Owen 1974. 'Sir Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard (1902–1973): An Appreciation', *Anthropos*, Vol. LXIX, pp. 553–67.

Buxton, L. H. Dudley (ed.) 1936. *Custom is King*, London: Hutchinson.

Douglas, Mary 1980. *Edward Evans-Pritchard*, New York: Viking Press.

Evans-Pritchard, E. E. 1934. 'Lévy-Bruhl's Theory of Primitive Mentality', *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, Fuad I University, Cairo*, Vol. II, no. 2, pp. 1–26.

. . . 1936. 'Daily Life of the Nuer in Dry Season Camps', in L. H. Dudley Buxton (ed.), *Custom is King*, London: Hutchinson.

. . . 1940a. 'Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, 1939', *Man*, Vol. XL, pp. 24–5.

EVANS-PRITCHARD, E. E. 1940b. *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

. . . 1940c. *The Political System of the Anuak of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*, London: Percy, Lund Humphries & Co.

. . . 1940d. 'The Political Structure of the Nandi-speaking Peoples of Kenya', *Africa*, Vol. XIII, pp. 250–67.

. . . 1945. 'The Sanusi of Cyrenaica', *Africa*, Vol. XV, no. 1, pp. 61–79.

. . . 1949. *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

. . . 1951. *Social Anthropology*, London: Cohen & West.

. . . 1956. *Nuer Religion*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

. . . 1961. *Anthropology and History*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

. . . 1962. *Essays in Social Anthropology*, London: Faber & Faber.

. . . 1971. *The Azande: History and Political Institutions*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

. . . 1973. 'Some Reminiscences and Reflections on Fieldwork', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, Vol. IV, pp. 1–12.

EVANS-PRITCHARD, E. E., RAYMOND FIRTH, BRONISLAW MALINOWSKI and ISAAC SHAPERA (eds.), *Essays Presented to C. G. Seligman*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.

FIRTH, RAYMOND 1981. 'Bronislaw Malinowski', in Sydel Silverman (ed.), *Totems and Teachers: Perspectives on the History of Anthropology*, New York: Columbia University Press.

. . . 1993. 'Raymond Firth on Social Anthropology: An Interview with Declan Quigley', *Social Anthropology*, Vol. I, pp. 207–22.

FORTES, MEYER 1980. 'Anthropologists and Theologians: Common Interests and Divergent Approaches', in M. F. C. Bourdillon and Meyer Fortes (eds.), *Sacrifice*, London: Academic Press.

FORTES, MEYER, and E. E. EVANS-PRITCHARD (eds.) 1940. *African Political Systems*, London: Oxford University Press.

JOHNSON, DOUGLAS 1981. 'The Fighting Nuer: Primary Sources and the Origins of a Stereotype', *Africa*, Vol. LI, pp. 508–27.

KROEBER, ALFRED L. 1952. *The Nature of Culture*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

KUPER, ADAM 1973. *Anthropologists and Anthropology: The British School 1922–1972*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

LEACH, EDMUND 1980. 'Cairo Essays' [review of Douglas 1980], *London Review of Books*, Vol. II, no. 23, pp. 24–5.

LÉVY-BRUHL, LUCIEN 1910. *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*, Paris: Alcan.

. . . 1949. *Les carnets de Lucien Lévy-Bruhl*, Paris: Alcan.

. . . 1952. 'A Letter to E. E. Evans-Pritchard', *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. III, pp. 117–23.

LOWIE, ROBERT H. 1920. *Primitive Society*, New York: Boni and Liveright.

. . . 1934. 'Religious Ideas and Practices of the Eurasiatic and North American Areas', in E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Raymond Firth, Bronislaw Malinowski and Isaac Schapera (eds.), *Essays Presented to C.G. Seligman*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.

MARETT, ROBERT RANULPH 1941. *A Jerseyman at Oxford*, London: Oxford University Press.

POWDERMAKER, HORTENSE 1966. *Stranger and Friend: The Way of an Anthropologist*, New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

RUEL, M. J. 1968. 'Marett, Robert Ranulph', in David L. Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. IX, New York: Macmillan, pp. 565–7.

THE LETTERS[6]

Letter 1

38, Mecklenburgh Square,
London W.C.1.

8 September 1931

Dear Dr. Lowie,

I have just received your letter from the field. I am very glad indeed that you will be able to see your way to write a paper for the Seligman Festschrift, if time allows. I do not think that there is any difficulty on this score as we are prepared to wait till next April or May for the MSS. I have therefore taken the liberty of adding your name to the list of those who have promised to contribute (a copy of which is enclosed) and I shall be grateful, if you think you can take part in our enterprise, if you will send me a title of your subject.

I may add that the enclosed list is a preliminary one and that there are still a number of people from whom I have not received replies.

Yours sincerely,
E. E. Evans-Pritchard

6. Of the 21 letters that are printed below, half are to be found in the University Archives in Berkeley (see footnote 2 above), viz. letters 1–6, 8–10, 12, and 13. The remainder come from the Kroeber Papers (letters 7, 11, 14–16, 19–21) and the Lowie Papers (letters 17 and 18). Most of the letters were handwritten and bear the author's signature (letters 2, 4, 10, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18, 19, and 21); some, however, were typed and bear a signature (letters 1, 7, 9, 16), and some have been transcribed from a carbon copy and were thus unsigned (letters 3, 5, 6, 8, 12, and 20). Letter 14 is a signed, handwritten postcard. Very little editorial change has been introduced into the texts of the letters, except for the correction of spelling mistakes and the standardization of layout, which might otherwise have interfered with ordinary readability.

Letter 2

Flat 18
1 Rue Monillard
Cairo
Egypt

24 May 1932

Dear Prof. Lowie,

I wonder whether you will be able to let me have your contribution to the Seligman Festschrift sometime in June or July.

I am sorry to press you but I get summer leave from the Egyptian University at Cairo and I want to send in the MSS to the publishers while I am in England.

My address will be 16 Cross Deep, Twickenham, Middlesex, England.

I am trying to cope with Egyptian University conditions but it is a hard swim against a tide of ignorance and incapacity.

Yours sincerely,
E. E. Evans-Pritchard

Letter 3

[*Washington, DC*]
June 10, 1932

Dr. E. E. Evans-Pritchard,
16 Cross Deep,
Twickenham, Middlesex,
England

Dear Dr. Evans-Pritchard:

I was very much interested to get your letter of May 24th, with your impressions of Egyptian University conditions.

I may say that I wrote you some time ago, but received no reply. Since the letter had obviously miscarried, I wrote to Dr. Malinowski's French address, asking whether the substitution of an article originally prepared for the Vancouver Congress would be legitimate. I have not heard from him, although there has been ample time; and since you are eager to get contributions as soon as possible, I am

enclosing the paper in question. I hope this will do in place of the one ['Theory and Practice in Ethnology'] originally contemplated.

With best wishes,

Sincerely yours,
Robert H. Lowie
Chairman, Division of
Anthropology and Psychology

Letter 4

Exeter College, Oxford
14 November 1935

Dear Dr. Lowie,

You may have heard that Dr. Marett vacates his readership in Social Anthropology at Oxford almost at once.

I am applying for the readership and I wonder whether you would be good enough to give me a testimonial. I am assuming, I hope not entirely erroneously, that you are acquainted with my work. We have only met for a few moments some years ago in London.

If you feel you can recommend me for the post on the grounds of my work I shall be very grateful to you as I have made 5 ethnological expeditions to Central Africa & want a few years of peace to write up my notes.

Yours sincerely,
E. E. Evans-Pritchard

Letter 5

[*Berkeley, California*]
December 2, 1935

Oxford University
England

Gentlemen,—

Mr. E. E. Evans-Pritchard has suggested my writing to you in connection with his candidacy for a readership at Oxford University. I am very glad to do so, but

must explain that I can do so only from the point of view of the general anthropologist, not as an Africanist, since my special investigations—apart from theory—lie in the Americanist field.

Having read several of Dr. Evans-Pritchard's articles, I should like to say that I consider them valuable and useful for my lectures on primitive supernaturalism. The field technique, involving the use of the native language as a tool, seems very good, and I am pleased to note the appreciative references to his predecessors—a feature often glaringly absent in recent publications. He is not a mere collector of raw facts, but brings them into relation with the theories of students of comparative religion. Here, again, I observe with satisfaction that he does not accept the mere dicta of 'authorities', but forms an independent judgment. I shall be greatly interested in his ultimate formulations and hope a University appointment will help to expedite them.

Very truly yours,
Robert H. Lowie
Professor of Anthropology

Letter 6

[*Berkeley, California*]
December 3, 1935

Dr. E. E. Evans-Pritchard
Exeter College
Oxford
England

Dear Dr. Evans-Pritchard,

It was news to me that Dr. Marett is retiring so soon, and I am interested to know that you are an applicant for the position. As you do not specify to whom the testimonial is to be sent, I am addressing it in the enclosed and unsealed envelope to Oxford University, and if necessary you can insert the name or office of the proper authorities. I certainly wish you the best of luck and hope that my letter may do its bit to assure you the position in question.

Sincerely yours,
Robert H. Lowie

Letter 7

Institute of Social Anthropology
1 Jowett Walk, Oxford

18 May 1948

Dear Professor Kroeber,

Just a line to thank you for the copy of your *Anthropology*, which I have just received. It is a book that is always in great demand among our students over here, and I am very glad indeed to have this new edition.

With best regards,

Yours sincerely,
E. E. Evans-Pritchard

Letter 8

[*Berkeley, California*]
October 4, 1949

Professor E. E. Evans-Pritchard
All Souls College
Oxford University
Oxford
England

Dear Professor Evans-Pritchard,

David Mandelbaum, writing from London, just reminds me that you are to be in Chicago for the first quarter of the year 1950 and might consider teaching in our First Summer Session, which extends from June 19th to July 28th. Needless to say, we should all be very happy if it were feasible for you to come. At the moment the budget for the Summer Sessions has not yet been fixed, but it is very likely that last year's salaries will be again available. [C. Daryll] Forde received travel expenses from the East and a fee of $1200. Current usage is for each lecturer to give two courses on five days of the week, from Monday to Friday, inclusive. The topics are, of course, chosen by the professor; but naturally, in your case, we should be very desirous of having one course on Africa. As a possibility I should suggest 'Primitive Religion' for the other. However, you are entirely free to select other topics.

The administration of the Summer Sessions is always eager to get relevant information at the earliest possible opportunity. I have just been notified that material for the Announcement of Courses should be available by the end of the current year. Could you then indicate whether you could arrange to come in the given circumstances, with a statement as to your subjects and the hours (from 9 on) that would suit your convenience? I may indicate that Forde lectured from 9 to 10 (actually 9:10 to 10:00) and from 11:10 to 12:00. These are considered very good hours; 12 to 1 is the universal lunching period here and may be eliminated from consideration.

Hoping to hear from you affirmatively, at least in principle, I am, with cordial greetings,

Sincerely yours,
Robert H. Lowie

P.S. A brief statement—say of 40 or 50 words each—concerning the nature of your courses would be appreciated.

Letter 9

University of Oxford
Institute of Social Anthropology
Museum House
South Parks Road
Oxford

13 October 1949

Dear Professor Lowie,

Many thanks indeed for your invitation to lecture at California. I am afraid, however, that Mandelbaum has got his dates a bit mixed up. I start work in Chicago on 5 January, and have to be back in Oxford by the middle of April, so unless Chicago are prepared to allow me to take off my last fortnight or so to visit California I should not be able to do so. This was the suggestion made to Mandelbaum, but of course so short a visit might not in any case suit you. If it does, I should have to ask Redfield's permission—unless you would care to do this yourself?

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,
E. E. Evans-Pritchard

Letter 10

The University of Chicago
Department of Anthropology

7 February 1950

Dear Prof. Lowie,

Thanks for the compliment, but I am afraid that I could not leave Oxford next academic year, especially since I have taken this term off to come to Chicago.

With all the rapid changes now taking place in England in the expansion of Anthropology I doubt whether you would find any English anthropologist available.

I am sorry not to have seen you in U.S.A., but California is a long way away from Chicago.

Yours sincerely,
E. E. Evans-Pritchard

Letter 11

The University of Chicago
Department of Anthropology

26 February 1950

Dear Prof. Kroeber,

I am spending a quarter at the University of Chicago and on my way back to England I shall be spending from 23rd March to 30th March in New York. I would very much like to meet you & Mrs Kroeber again and, as I shall have a good number of appointments in New York, I thought that maybe you would excuse my writing some time in advance to ask you whether you could give me a time when I might call on you.

As we are both historically minded people, I wonder whether you have seen my last book, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (Clarendon Press). If not, I will ask them to send you a copy. It is an anthropologist's attempt to write political history. Fortes says it is 'mere literature'. I call it 'history'. Radcliffe-Brown, with great charity, calls it 'diachronic sociology'!

Yours sincerely,
E. E. Evans-Pritchard

Letter 12

[*Berkeley, California*]
March 6, 1950

Professor Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard
Department of Anthropology
University of Chicago
Chicago 37, Illinois

Dear Professor Evans-Pritchard:

As you may have heard, I retire on June 30, 1950. My successor has been appointed, but will not be able to come to us before September 1951, which raises the problem of a visiting professor for the academic year that begins in September 1950 and closes in the beginning of June 1951 so far as lectures are concerned. I have been asked to cast about for a visiting professor for the period indicated, and you were naturally among those the Department would regard eminently desirable. Would it, then, be possible for you to come to us in September of this year and remain until June 1951? Before reaching even a tentative decision you obviously require information on certain points, which I shall try to give you forthwith.

The minimum salary of a full professor at the University is now $7,200; I should naturally propose a somewhat higher figure to the Administration. The normal teaching load of a professor is eight hours a week,—one 2-hour seminar for graduate students, two 3-hour lecture 'Upper Division' courses (for senior and junior undergraduates). It might be possible to offer two seminars and one lecture course. So far as subject matter goes, our policy is to leave that largely to the visitor, with the hope that he will give our students the advantages of his special knowledge. In your case a general course on Africa, with such emphasis as you desire and extending over the year would be ideal from our point of view. Then there is the course on 'Primitive Religion' which Mandelbaum and I have given in recent years, but which we cannot offer every year because of other urgent requirements. Seminar topics have differed widely. My 'History and Theory' seminar has been very elastic in this respect. It has sometimes dealt with the history of cultural anthropology, sometimes with special topics, such as Primitive Literature, Folklore, particular schools of thought, individual scholars; currently I am devoting the course to Boas, each participant contributing a report on some special phase of his work viewed in historical perspective.

If there are any further points on which you wish enlightenment, please let me know.

Hoping to hear from you in the near future, I remain

Cordially yours,
Robert H. Lowie

P.S. Quite apart from this matter, I should have sent you a line of friendly greeting before this, but I had to undergo an operation in January and, though able to resume lectures after a slight setback, am not able to do much more.

Letter 13

The University of Chicago
Chicago 37 – Illinois
Department of Anthropology

8 March 1950

Dear Prof. Lowie,

It has just struck me that Radcliffe-Brown is at a loose end & might very well accept an offer.

Yours sincerely,
E. E. Evans-Pritchard

Letter 14

[Chicago, n. d., March 1950?]

Prof. A. L. Kroeber
Dept. of Anthropology
Columbia University
New York, 27

Very many thanks. I will come to your house at 6.0 on Saturday, March 25th. My wife is not with me.

Yours sincerely,
E. E. Evans-Pritchard

Letter 15

All Souls College
Oxford

19 September 1950

Dear Prof. Kroeber,

I hope that I have not misrepresented you in this lecture ['Social Anthropology: Past and Present'].

I shall be glad of comments because I am using most of the argument again in a series of B.B.C. talks, which will be published next winter as a book [*Social Anthropology*].

I wrote this lecture, & in this vein, because, in addition to a dislike of positivism in all its forms, I felt that Social Anthropology in England had to be forced to reconsider the hypotheses on which it was working, which led to arid classifications & a never ending discussion about the methods of such things as biology & astro-physics. Also, its total neglect of culture has unfortunately reduced its problems to the kind of formal sociology which ends when it began.

My wife joins me in our regards to you both.

Yours sincerely,
E. E. Evans-Pritchard

Letter 16

University of Oxford
Institute of Social Anthropology
11 Keble Road
Oxford

5 November 1952

Dear Kroeber,

Many thanks for the copy of your book, 'The Nature of Culture.' I am very glad to have this, and am just sitting down to read it.

Yours sincerely,
E-P.

Letter 17

Center for Advanced Study in the Behavorial Sciences
202 Junipero Serra Boulevard – Stanford, California

16 October 1956

Dear Prof. Lowie,

I am at this Center and hope to be able to see you again. Perhaps when you get back to Berkeley you could let me know. Our home is 951 Hamilton, Palo Alto (Tel:– Davenport 4–4615).

I shall look forward to our meeting.

Yours sincerely,
E. E. Evans-Pritchard

Letter 18

University of Oxford
Institute of Social Anthropology
11 Keble Road, Oxford

10 October 1957

Dear Mrs Lowie,

I have just received a letter from Leslie Spier to tell me of your husband's death. You will, I hope, allow me to express to you my sympathy. It is also a great satisfaction for me that I was able to meet him again and to enjoy such pleasant conversations with him so recently.

I would like to add that, in my opinion, no one has done more for anthropology than Dr. Lowie. When I was a student, my teacher, Dr. Seligman, told me that whatever else I read, I must read & read again 'Primitive Society'; and when I did my research among the Nuer, where transport was non-existent & a choice had to be made, I decided to take with me as my only anthropological guide, that book. I have read everything else, I believe, since, that he wrote; and my admiration has increased for his learning, method, tolerance, geniality and good humour. I am afraid that such an appreciation is the only comfort merely a colleague, and a junior one, can offer.

Yours sincerely,
E. E. Evans-Pritchard

Letter 19

from E. E. Evans-Pritchard
All Souls College,
Oxford

15 November 1959

Dear Prof. Kroeber,

I have been meaning to write to you for some time but I have had a difficult last two years. Last year my mother [Dorothea Edwards] died and this year my wife [Ioma Gladys Heaton Nicholls] died also, after a long and depressing illness. I now have to cope with five children between the ages of 1½ and 17.

I do wish I could meet you again for, apart from liking you as a person, I have, as you must know, a very great admiration for your works. Is there any chance of your coming to Europe again in the near future and would you come if an opportunity arose?

I am now going to bother you. I gave a lecture recently—now to be published—to a priory of Dominican monks on 'Religion and the anthropologists'.[7] It is a fragment of a chapter on the history of ideas, dealing with the attitude of sociologists and anthropologists towards religion, and more especially Christianity, from Comte & Saint-Simon till today. In it I have made the remarks about Americans I enclose with this letter. I shall be most grateful if you will, without going to any great trouble, confirm that what I have said is correct.

With kindest regards,

Yours sincerely,
E. E. Evans-Pritchard

'Morgan, the founder of Social Anthropology in America, refused to have anything to do with religion and he particularly abhorred ritualistic religion.... Among the last generation of distinguished American anthropologists there was not one, as far as I know, who gave assent to any creed or who regarded all religious belief as other than illusion; and I do not know of a single person among the prominent sociologists and anthropologists of America at the present time who adheres to any faith.'

7. Evans-Pritchard delivered the Aquinas Lecture on 7 March 1959 at Hawkesyard Priory, Oxford. See Evans-Pritchard 1962: 29–45.

Letter 20

[*Berkeley, California*]
December 28, 1959

My dear Evans-Pritchard:

I had learned of the death of your charming and devoted wife, and felt very sorry for both of you.

I just spent two months, with J. Huxley, Sir Darwin, and others you know, at Chicago University, on the Darwin Centennial, and my present feeling is that I have done enough teaching, symposiuming and the like for this life. At any rate, I look forward to doing a stretch of writing, quietly at home. However, Paul Fejos, ever since his [Wenner-Gren] Foundation got the castle [Burg Wartenstein] in Austria, has been after me to visit there for a summer fortnight with a group of Europeans, and while I have so far not agreed, the possibility is still open if my health holds.

As to religion, I have sometimes thought my frequent study of it may have been a surrogate for not having one of my own to practice and believe; my parents were both agnostics. How completely American anthropologists in general are wholly without religion or profession of it, I do not know; but it is certainly very common. I did hear that the late Frank Speck of Philadelphia was once converted by the evangelist Billy Sunday; but this may have been just teasing by his friends. I do not personally recall any American anthropologist who is an attending member of a Protestant church. Some few may belong without going, out of respect for their still living or dead parents.

As to Morgan, I recall his anti-Catholic or perhaps anti-Latin remarks when he travelled Europe late in life—Leslie White published excerpts from his diary in Rochester Hist. Soc. Publs. 16: 219–389, 1937. See also, on your question, White's 'Morgan's Attitude Toward Religion and Science', American Anthropologist 46: 218–230, 1944.

If I run across any exceptions to your generalization I will write you.

Of course there have been American *Catholic* Clericals who have been professional anthropologists, like the late Monsignor Cooper and Father Ewing of Fordham College.

Best luck to you,
Alfred L. Kroeber

Letter 21

All Souls College
Oxford

14 March 1960

Dear Prof. Kroeber,

I am sorry that I shall not be with you at the Wenner-Gren conference. It comes just at the end of my children's annual holiday & coincides with their return to school, for both of which I am now solely responsible. Even if this were not so, I would be disinclined to attend, as it seems to me that such conferences are a waste of time, & also of money, which might be spent to better purpose on research.

I trust that on your way back to U.S.A. you will pay us a visit. It will be much appreciated by all at Oxford.

Yours very sincerely,
E. E. E-P