

HOLLY PET

Culture Sketches

case studies in anthropology

Third Edition

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Case Studies in Anthropology

THIRD EDITION

Holly Peters-Golden

The University of Michigan



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CULTURE SKETCHES: CASE STUDIES IN ANTHROPOLOGY

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Preface

Through anthropology's lens, we can simultaneously see both our kinship with all the rest of humanity and our uniqueness among cultures. Students peering through this lens for the first time often ask, "How are they the same as we are?" "How are they different?" And it is usually with delight that these new students discover both striking similarities and surprising differences.

This volume is an introduction to fifteen societies, and each glimpse is brief and necessarily incomplete. It is my hope that any student who is intrigued will look further into the past and present lives of these people. As such, the chapters are aimed more at sparking interest than appeasing it.

The groups selected are all peoples whose traditional cultures are uniquely their own. Each has distinctive patterns and practices; each has faced the challenge of an encroaching world, with differing results. Moreover, each people presented provide a powerful illustration of important concepts in introductory anthropology courses: Azande witchcraft, Aztec human sacrifice, Trobriand *kula* exchange, Minangkabau matriliney. As such, the volume not only stands alone as an introduction to these societies, but is also a valuable companion to anthropology texts, most notably Kottak's introductory texts, which use all of these societies as examples.

Many of the peoples presented herein are involved in the diaspora; some struggle to preserve old ways in new places. Kaluli music has been the vehicle for an aggressive campaign to prevent rainforest destruction. The isolation of the Tiwi was a salient feature in the development of much of their indigenous culture. Today, they are no longer isolated. They encourage tourism, while making sure younger generations are still taught to gather preferred "bush foods." Nomadic pastoralists like the Basseri face challenges both from governments who think sedentary peoples are more "civilized," as well as

from environmental analysts who are concerned about the impact of pastoralism and expanding deserts on agricultural lands. Resettlement and development, such as that undertaken among the Azande, cannot succeed if motivated solely by goals of industrial development but uninformed by indigenous culture.

Our world is more than ever a world of change. The exploration and promotion of cultural diversity has been embraced as a mission on some campuses, feared as a strategy of separatism by others, used as a weapon in other venues. As we are increasingly faced with a global culture, anthropology takes on an even greater responsibility to foster respect for differences in the face of change.

The Third Edition

This edition adds three new chapters and updates most chapters from the Second Edition. Each new chapter represents both traditions which are singular, and other traditions which are shared. The new chapters are as follows:

Haitians |

This chapter investigates the history and culture of the poorest and least urban country in the Western Hemisphere. It details the ethnic, religious, and sociopolitical conflicts within the country, as well as the unique challenges faced by the one-half million Haitians in diaspora in the United States.

The Hmong |

The Hmong are a tribal people with a long history of struggle and rebellion in the face of oppression. This chapter details Hmong life and culture in Southern China, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand, their involvement in the war in Indochina, and the cultural challenges of their resettlement in the United States.

The Minangkabau |

The Minangkabau provide an example of a society with matrilineal descent. This chapter explores Minangkabau kinship, the tradition of *merantau* (male outmigration), and the ways in which Minangkabau balance the different demands and expectations of *adat* (customary law) and Islam.

In addition to these all-new chapters, many chapters have been updated to include recent ethnographic information. Those chapters with the most substantial changes are:

The Aztec |

While the complex Aztec empire is no more, its history figures prominently into the discourse of modern Mexico's national identity. This is discussed in a new section entitled "Mexican Nationalism: The Modern Aztec Legacy."

The Ju/'hoansi |

This chapter has been retitled to reflect the preference of the people themselves, formerly called the !Kung. The new section entitled "The Ju/'hoansi Today" details consequences of governmental policy on traditional Ju/'hoansi life, and the ways in which the people are challenged by the world system.

The Nuer |

Civil war erupted in Sudan in the 1990s, resulting in widespread resettlement. The new section "Nuer in the United States" examines challenges face by Nuer who have resettled in Minnesota, who attempt to find ways to reconstitute allegiances outside the bounds of the traditional segmentary lineage organization.

The Ojibwa |

The section "Ojibwa Today" has been expanded to discuss the experiences of Native Americans who migrated to urban areas, government policy towards the preservation of Native culture, and the potential benefits—and costs—of gaming on the reservation.

The Samoans |

A new section entitled "The Great Migration and Beyond" examines Samoan life in Hawaii and mainland United States, and the ways in which local Samoan organizations both maintain tradition and shape it to local needs.

The Yanomamo |

The new section, "Yanomamo: Changing Culture and Modern Tragedies", addresses encroachment on Yanomamo land, the toll taken by introduced diseases, and the devastation wrought by gold miners.

Organization |

Each chapter provides an overview of a society's history, social organization, economic and political system, religion, expressive culture, and engagement

with the modern world system. In addition, each group has been included because its traditional culture explicates a particular concept taught in introductory anthropology, as described by the new subtitles for each (see table of contents). However, the holistic approach taken in all chapters allows instructors to assign a chapter as exemplar of several different concepts. For example, the Minangkabau chapter speaks to matrilineal kinship, but also to the ways in which outmigration of men influences residence patterns and economics, as well as the conflicts between traditional *adat* and the demands of Islam. Thus, it might be read during a discussion of kinship, marriage, religion, or social structure, among others.

Pedagogical Aids

In addition to the chapter subtitles mentioned above—which help students identify the key theme running through each chapter—we have added a world map at the beginning of the book so students can see at a glance where each group is located geographically. This map also includes the phonetic spelling of each group, so students don't have to struggle with pronunciation. In-chapter photographs and maps round out the narrative material and end-of-chapter study questions challenge students to think about what they have read and begin applying their knowledge.

Instructor Supplements Package

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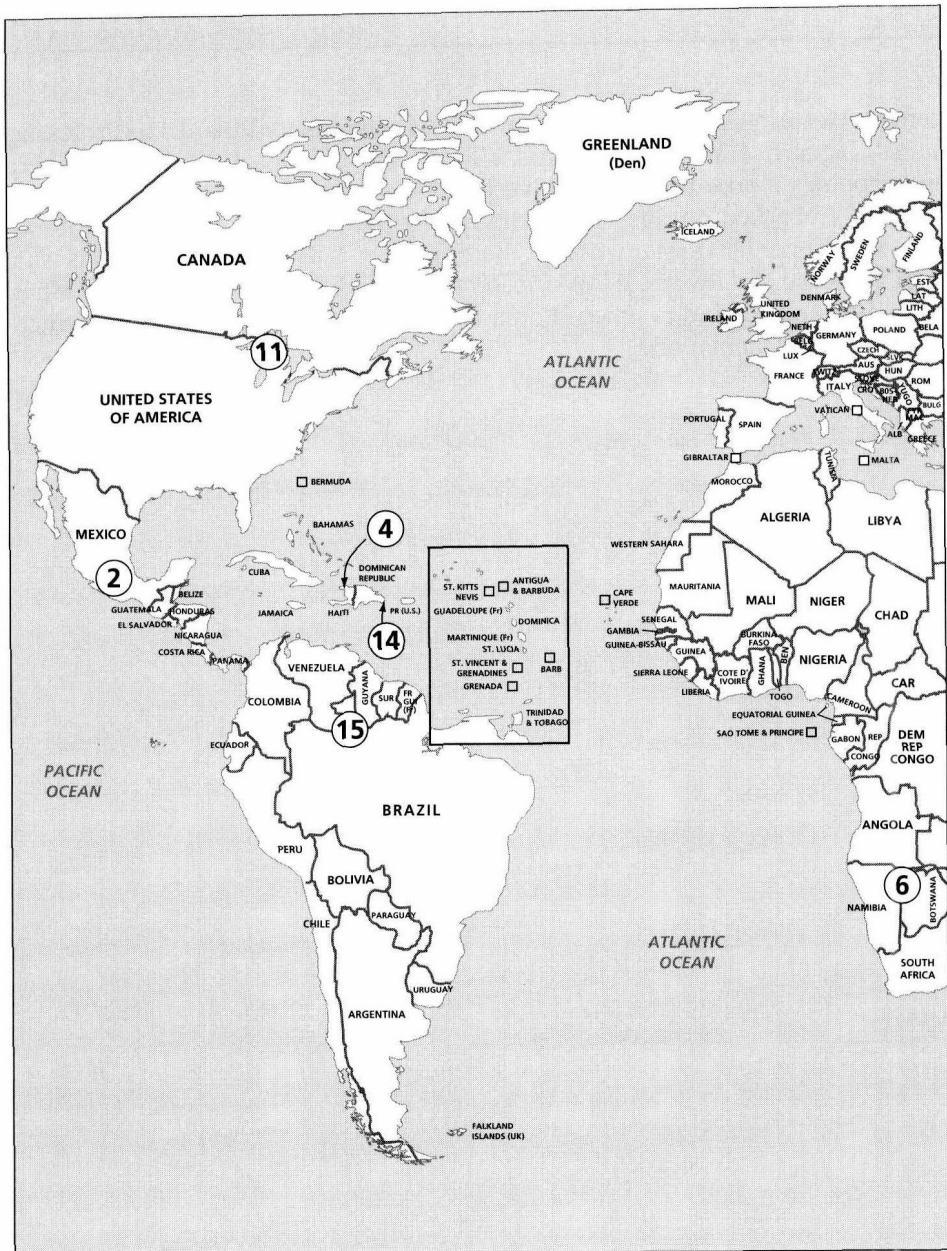
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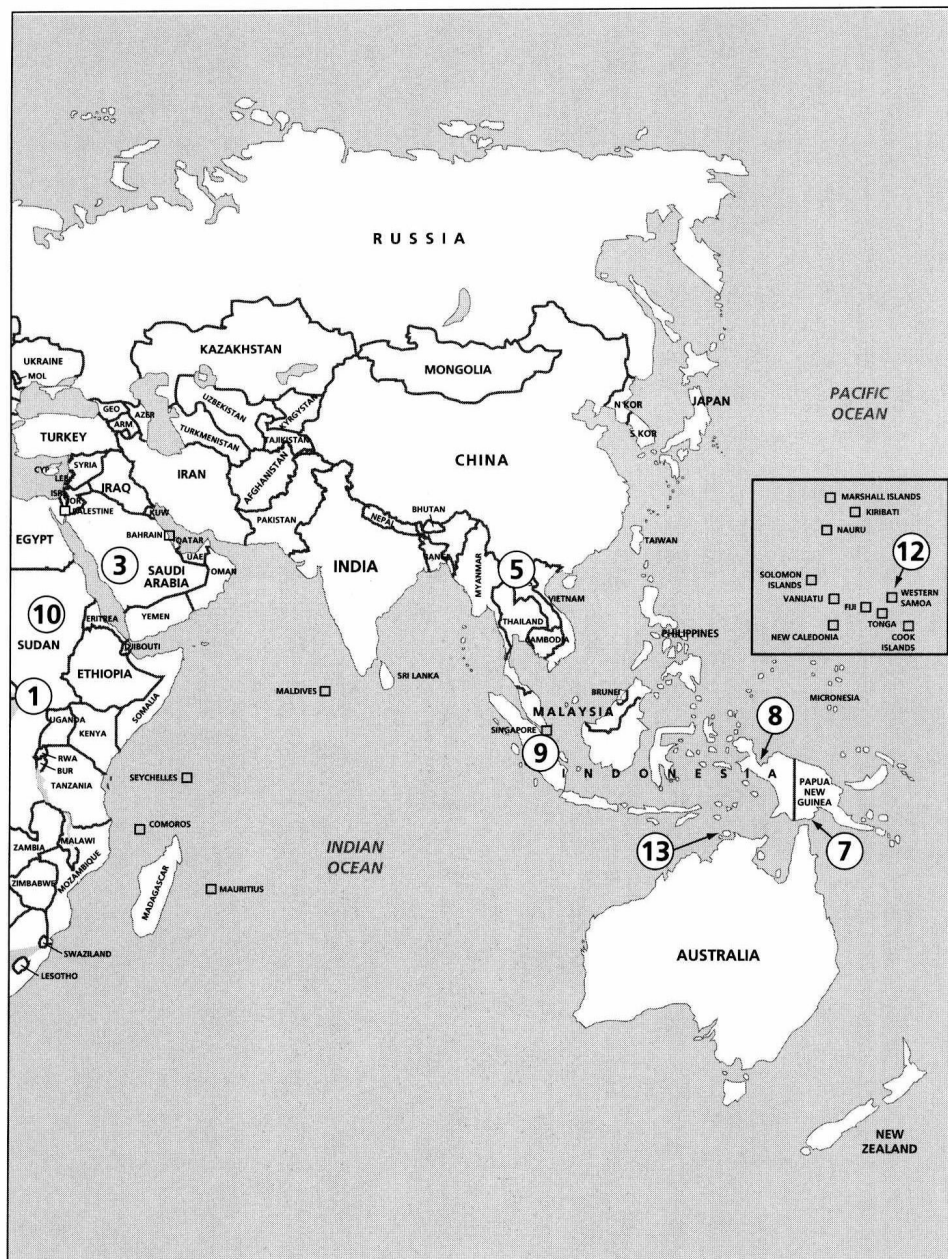
Lefler—Western California State University. I offer belated thanks to Professor James Taggart, Franklin and Marshall College, who was the first to open anthropology's door to me and ably guide me over the threshold.

As I embarked on this Third Edition, my parents' part in its earlier iterations was never far from my mind. Their memory is as much a blessing as was their presence. As always, it is Marc, Rebecca, and Jenna who provided all that no one else could, and to whom I offer thanks and admiration of a kind which is reserved for them alone.

Holly Peters-Golden



- ① The Azande (a-ZON-day)
- ② The Aztec (AZ-tek)
- ③ The Basseri (BASS-uh-ree)
- ④ The Haiti (HAY-tee)
- ⑤ The Hmong (Mung)
- ⑥ The Ju/ 'hoansi (zhoo-TWA-see)
- ⑦ The Kaluli (Ka-LOO-lee)
- ⑧ The Kapauku (Ka-POW-koo)
- ⑨ The Minangkabau (Mee-NONG-kuh-bau)
- ⑩ The Nuer (NEW-air)
- ⑪ The Ojibwa (o-JIB-wah)
- ⑫ The Samoans (suh-MO-ans)
- ⑬ The Tiwi (TEE-wee)
- ⑭ The Trobriand (TRO-bree-and)
- ⑮ The Yanomamo (YAH-no-MAH-mo)



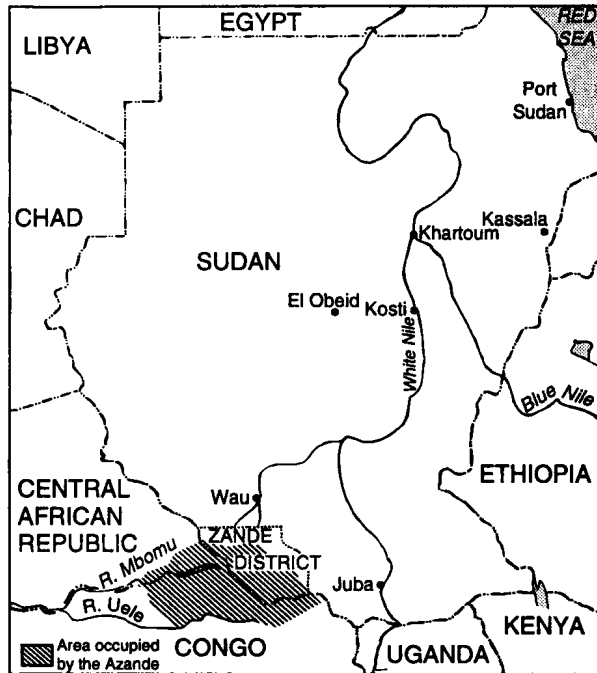
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The Azande

Witchcraft and Oracles in Africa



The Beginning

There are those who can set broken bones. Only they, and people healed by them, can do this. The first of them long ago fathered a child, and the child had no arms and no legs. He was round, like a cooking pot. People saw him and knew he was a child of Mbori, the supreme being. The ancestor had a dream. In the dream he was told to burn the child, and this he did. He was told to take the child's ashes and mix them with oil; this he could use to heal broken limbs. The ancestor did all he was told to do. He used the ashes of the child born with no limbs and created the clan of those who can heal the broken limbs of others.

Introduction and History

The Azande people live in a large area in the center of Africa, in the south-western Sudan, north of Zaire and to the east of the Central African Republic. Sudan is Africa's largest country, measuring roughly a quarter the size of the United States. This is an area of rolling hills with abundant rivers and streams.

2 *The Azande*

On the banks of the waters grow tall trees, which provide shade in which to build homesteads. However, Azande fell victim to sleeping sickness spread by the tse-tse fly, which breeds in thick bush. Sudanese authorities, concerned about this exposure, forced them to relocate to concentrated settlements near roads. (The closeness of the houses in these new settlements was especially problematic. Formerly, structures along the river banks could be spread far apart; this was preferable to the Azande, who feared neighbors' potential witchcraft, which was only effective at close range.)

The peoples known collectively as the Azande are a melding together of what were separate clans in the past. In earliest times, the clans who lived along the banks of the waters were autonomous local groups. Clan disputes were settled within the families of which they were comprised. Disputes between clans were settled by elders from each. Azande history tells of a single individual who, through his wisdom and kindness, gained power within his own clan, the Avongara. Soon, under his able leadership, it became the dominant group. Moving eastward along the riverbanks, the Avongara conquered more than fifty other clans, and eventually amalgamated into one Azande group. The history of the area is characterized by such invasions and warfare. (Reining 1966)

In the late nineteenth century, French and Belgian expeditions had set up military outposts in the Sudan; by the early twentieth century the Azande district was under British rule, which lasted until 1953. In that year, growing Sudanese nationalism led to Britain's granting of self-government. Sudan claimed independence in 1956, setting into motion a succession of unstable parliamentary governments and military regimes. Fundamentalist Islamic law was instituted in 1983, and was followed by a series of civil wars among Sudanese of varying religious, ethnic, and political allegiances.

Settlements

Traditionally, the individual homestead of each couple and their children is the focus of the economic system. The construction and maintenance of homes are constant occupations, especially owing to the toll taken on them by weather, insects, animals, and fast-growing vegetation.

Homes are built of mud and grass, framed on wooden poles, and thatched with grass. (One addition to traditional Azande homes is the European introduction of doors fitted with hinges and locks.) In addition to this living space, each household unit has a granary for storing millet. Houses are built around courtyards, which provide ideal places for gathering and conversation. These enclosed courtyards are seen as a window into the household life. Their upkeep is critical since they are seen as evidence of the responsibility or industriousness of their owners. Reining (1966:69) reports that his Azande informants would comment on the state of disrepair of their neighbor's homestead, and "analyzed courtyards as reflections of the inhabitants." They did not exempt themselves from such scrutiny; he continues: "I received a number of apologies from the heads of households about the state of their courtyards,

with full explanations for the deficiencies of which they were ashamed.” (Reining 1966:69)

The traditional courtyard arrangement appeared to have changed very little with European contact (Reining 1966), with the arrangement of each courtyard reflecting the composition of the household to which it is attached. Because each woman must have her own house and granary, polygynous households will have numerous homes and granaries around its courtyard. In a monogamous household, the average courtyard space is about sixty-five feet in its largest dimension. Households with more adult women may have yards of one hundred feet square. Courtyards belonging to the households of chiefs are double this size.

“Kitchen gardens” are planted adjacent to the courtyards. These are used for plants that don’t require large-scale harvesting or great attention. Pineapple, mango, papaya, and miscellaneous perennial plants used for meals immediately upon picking are found in these plots.

Subsistence and Manufacture

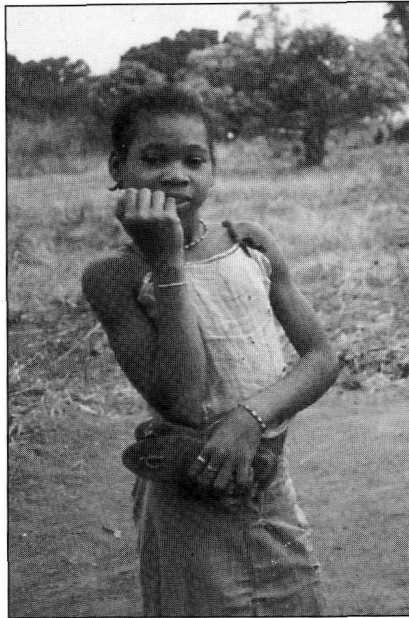
The Azande practice shifting cultivation (that is, no crop rotation, and incorporating a fallowing period), relying mostly on maize and millet, gourds and pumpkins, manioc and bananas, groundnuts, and beans. The tse-tse fly, problematic to animals as well as humans, makes cattle herding impossible. Whatever meat is consumed is secured through hunting. There is also a tradition of using forested areas to gather plants they do not cultivate. Dogs and chickens are the only domesticated animals.

The region has ample rainfall and many springs. These were a focus of Zande life, because they provided usable water nearly year-round. Water for daily use was carried from stream to homestead and the washing, among other activities, was done at the river banks. In fact, the stream was central to Azande life in conceptual as well as practical terms. For example, distance is expressed by the number of streams between the points in question; the length of a journey is the number of streams crossed during travel. When asked about an exact location (such as an individual’s birthplace) the answer will be the stream nearest that location. Given the centrality of the stream to the Azande, their relocation by the European administration caused major disruption in their cultural beliefs and practices.

The year consists of two seasons, one rainy and one dry. During the rainy summer, Azande cultivate their land. Although they have a long growing season and no frosts, the soil is not rich and insects are troublesome. As the hot, dry weather begins, crops mature and are harvested.

Hunting was most feasible in the dry season, when tall grasses had died or were burned, and when the harvest was over. During the rains, vegetation was too dense to allow necessary visibility.

Because rivers were low during this dry season, fish were more accessible. Men employed basket traps, which they set in the rapids of rivers; women dammed the streams into small shallow pools, drained them by bailing, and



collected the fish, snakes, and crustaceans that remained. Termites were a favorite food, and their high fat and protein content made them a nutritious part of the diet.

In pre-European days, each family was an independent unit of production. Iron tools and spears were used as bridewealth items, but in general there was no tradition of exchange between households, which consisted of a wife or wives, husband, their children, and other dependents (such as widowed elderly). There was a sexual division of labor, and both women's and men's work were necessary to maintain an efficiently functioning household. Construction and repair of the house and granary were the responsibility of men. The arduous task of maintaining the courtyard and its gardens fell solely to women. Wealth, possessed mainly by chiefs, was primarily in the form of foodstuffs; the tradition of destroying a person's worldly goods upon death left little chance of inheritance of property.

Azande have no tradition of occupational specialization. All manufacturing and craftwork were considered largely avocations, done by most. Woodworking and pottery, making nets and baskets, and crafting clothing out of bark were the most important of these skills.

Social and Political Organization

Kinship |

Among the Azande, clan affiliation was not stressed at the local level. E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1971), the ethnographer most responsible for knowledge about the Azande, found, as he endeavored to gather genealogies, that "except in the royal

clan, genealogical relationships between clansmen were very seldom known and usually quite untraceable" (p. 14). Local groups, according to Evans-Pritchard, are, in essence, political units. He reports that his discovering members of the same clan living near one another is due as much to chance as anything else.

Chiefdoms |

In pre-European times, the Azande were organized into a number of chiefdoms (sometimes called kingdoms), each of which was independent from the others. The Avongara were nobility; in these days of Azande chiefdoms, it was to Avongara lineages that chiefs belonged. Despite the fact that chiefs of differing groups all belonged to the same clan, there was ongoing hostility and warfare between them.

Chiefs ruled their lands and peoples by appointing emissaries (usually sons, but always Avongara) who were sent out to manage various sections of their territories. Within these communities, commoners were deputized to aid in administration.

Chiefs functioned as military leaders, economic leaders, and political leaders. Unmarried men were recruited into groups that functioned both as warriors and laborers on the king's lands. The governors of the territories had gardens which were also worked by these troops. Both governors and chiefs collected food from the peoples in their domain (provincial governors sending to the chief a portion of their tribute as well) to be redistributed. In addition to food, spears and other items (often payment for fines or bridewealth) were redistributed by the chiefs.

Warfare |

Several miles of unsettled forest and bush were maintained among chiefdoms. Watch was kept on these borders by trusted sentinels who were designated to build their houses along these boundaries.

During the rainy season when grass grew tall and provided good cover, surprise attacks were made on these border sentries, usually ordered by the provincial leader. He undertook this action on his own, without permission granted from the chief. Counsel, however, was sought from a poison oracle, a process wherein poison is administered to an animal while questions are posed to the inhabiting spirit. The poisoned animal's behavior, as well as the point at which it succumbed to the poison, were interpreted by those with such skills. Information was obtained concerning the most propitious days and place for the raid, the expected level of casualties, and which companies of warriors should be entrusted with the most dangerous duties. If the oracle indicated that the time was not right for victory, the plans were abandoned.

The oracle also designated a suitable time and place for the attack, and the proper individual to act as a spy. This individual was sent to report on as many aspects of the homestead to be raided as he could determine. Often the spy went under the pretense of visiting a relative or wishing to trade. The best time for a raid was on a feast day when men would be involved in the festivities, not

likely to be armed, and quite likely to be drunk. To determine the exact day of the feast, the spy would plan his visit during the preparations for the festivities. Because beer was always brewed for the celebration, the spy could determine the feast day based on the stage of the brewing process.

A successful raid yielded tools, arms, food, and chickens, some of which were sent to the chief for redistribution. Whatever could not be carried off was destroyed. Huts and granaries were burned.

In addition to raids, there were larger mobilizations of war campaigns on a grand scale. These were ordered by the chief, after having consulted his own poison oracle, and might continue over a period of weeks. While knives and spears were used exclusively in raids, the introduction of rifles into these larger confrontations resulted in a shift from hand-to-hand combat to shots being fired from a distance. Only when ammunition was exhausted would those warriors yielding spears converge on the enemy.

Marriage |

The traditional Azande system of marriage was greatly disrupted by European involvement. Administrators legislated broad changes, especially regarding bride payment, divorce, and age at marriage. Although many of these were ostensibly designed to improve the status of women, ethnographer Reining (1966:61-2) regards them rather as “an experiment in altering some aspects of a culture without providing for changes in values. . . . [illustrating] the unpredictability of arbitrary cultural changes.” Azande did not share the European view that marriage was especially disadvantageous to women, whom they never regarded as servile, despite administrative interpretation of their customs.

Traditionally, the instigation for marriage among the Azande came from the potential groom. When a man wanted to marry a woman, he asked an intermediary to approach her father with his offer. Unless the suitor was deemed undesirable immediately, her father would discuss the matter first with his brothers and sisters, and next with the woman in question. If she was agreeable, the money sent with the intermediary was accepted.

Several days later, the suitor would visit his promised bride's parents, bringing gifts, and demonstrating his respect. In turn, their daughter visited her suitor's home for a “trial period” of several weeks, after which she returned to her parents home to make her final decision regarding the marriage.

During the time spent in reflection by the woman, the groom-to-be consulted oracles to determine whether the marriage, should it occur, would be a happy one. If both oracle and woman regarded the match favorably, the bride's family traveled to the home of the groom, where the ceremony took place. The marriage was sealed with the installation of the new bride's own cooking hearth.

Reining (1966) describes traditional Zande marriage as a process which continues indefinitely over time, with a protracted payment of brideprice. A small part of the price was paid at the time of the marriage ceremony, but in reality a husband was always indebted to his wife's family. It was always his