

Seligman 1932). Previously, in the preface to *The Nuer*, he had referred to this material as "their brilliant researches" (1940a: vii). Here again, Evans-Pritchard is encountered taking an initial position in print, which his latter comments made clear he did not subscribe to, and thus eventually felt compelled to disown.

In neither instance is it reasonable to interpret these positions and subsequent recantations as the result of an intellectual reconsideration. However, there are grounds on which to hypothesize that, for whatever reason, Evans-Pritchard was inclined to cooperate with and speak agreeably of his colleagues while they were alive, but moved to set the record straight after their demise and shortly before his own. This proclivity leads to the possibility that Evans-Pritchard's conclusions about Nuer prophets may not necessarily be related to an intellectual failing which others found so easy to rectify.

Those inclined to assume that he had an inexplicable blind spot on this very issue need only refer to Evans-Pritchard's discussion of the political roles of al-Sanusi al-Kabir and his son, Sayyid al-Mahdi, in the origin and expansion of the Sanusi order in Libya and the western Sudan during the nineteenth century (Evans-Pritchard 1949: 11-19). In many historical and sociological ways, these two figures closely parallel the prophet and the priest among the Nuer (see Beidelman 1971). However, in this instance Evans-Pritchard was quite emphatic in delineating the political significance of these religious functionaries among the acephalous Bedouin, whose social organization was modelled along lines similar to that of the Nuer. Moreover, Evans-Pritchard's diachronic analysis and coherent presentation of the data in direct contrast to, as well as much more convincing than, the pages devoted to the similar topic in the Nuer ethnography. Although this monograph on the Sanusi was published some years after *The Nuer*, it did precede *Nuer Religion*, in which the prophet's role receives further commentary. Therefore, Evans-Pritchard had sufficient opportunity and reason to recast his initial remarks.

A further evaluation of the Sanusi study in the context of this discussion suggests a rationale for Evans-Pritchard's political underestimation of Nuer prophets. I refer to the vehement anti-colonial nature of the commentary, which pervades the entire Sanusi volume in conjunction with an explicit portrayal of the heroism and suffering of the Bedouin in resisting the European incursion into North Africa. In the preface, Evans-Pritchard admits to his "indignation" (1949: iv), and explains his use of Arabic place names instead of the Italian, for the latter referents "... commemorated persons who for the most part might well be forgotten" (1949: v). Later in the text he refers to the European greed for possessions which at the time was "... bringing them rapidly to disaster," and characterized Sayyid al-Mahdi with the words: "He wished only to be left alone to worship God according to the teachings of his Prophet, and when in the end he fought the French it was in defense of the religious life as he understood it" (Evans-Pritchard 1949: 23).