

## A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SOCIAL SYSTEM OF THE LUGBARA.

presumably by John Middleton. ?

The Lugbara and Madi (properly Ma'di, but I shall keep the traditional spelling) are the most easterly speakers of the Eastern Sudanic group of languages, which stretches from the Lake Chad region to the Nile Valley. They are usually referred to by Government sources as Nilotic tribes; this is incorrect. They are distinct both culturally and linguistically from the neighbouring Nilotic peoples to the east of the Nile.

The ~~Madi~~ Lugbara live on the Nile-Congo watershed, which is here the boundary between Uganda and the Belgian Congo, being concentrated on this high stretch of country (4000 to 5000 feet above sea level) and spreading east and west across the open and almost treeless plains which stretch to the Nile and Uele valleys. The Madi live on either side of the Nile where it passes out of Uganda into the Sudan. The term Madi is a confusing one, since many of the Lugbara refer to themselves as Madi and a good proportion of the Nilotic Acholi and Alur are of original Madi stock. Since I have not yet worked among the Madi, I shall refer only to the Lugbara in the remainder of this report.

The Lugbara number about 250000 people (164000 in Uganda and 88100 in the Congo) living in an area of some 60 miles by 120 miles, giving an average population density of 35 per square mile. This figure is misleading, since the central districts on the Nile-Congo divide have a density in places of over 100 to the square mile and some of the outlying areas are almost uninhabited.

In Uganda each county, the present administrative division, is in charge of a Sultan, most of whom are men of status in their own clan but living outside their own clan area; under them are Wakils, about five in each county, and under them are Bakungu and Nyaparas. These are all paid officials and liable to transfer. In the Congo the chiefs, known as Makoto, Okila and Kapita, are always the hereditary heads of a clan in the county area. In both territories the counties are modern creations based on indigenous groupings; in almost all cases they are very much larger than anything found under the old system.

What is now the West Nile District of Uganda was brought under Belgian administration in 1900. In 1912 it became part of the Sudan and in 1914 was ceded to Uganda. Before this date administration was very slight, and on at least one occasion the Belgian garrison was killed. Before 1900 contact with the outside world had been limited to the appearance of Arab slavers and to Emin Pasha's and other Sudanese troops who passed through the area at the time of the Mahdi revolt. This contact was limited to the area along the Nile and so hardly affected the Lugbara directly, although today there are still a few old men who were taken as slaves as children.

The Lugbara are predominantly agriculturalists, although they say once they were an essentially cattle-owning people. Today the number of livestock is not large. The main food crops, from which the thick porridge which is the staple diet is prepared are various millets and sorghums; other grains are grown, including simsim and maize, chiefly for beer. In addition cassava is grown extensively both as a staple and as a famine crop. As relish for the porridge there are grown beans, peas, groundnuts, sweet potatoes and many other vegetables. Meat and fish are eaten, but usually only on special occasions. Except for certain meats, all food can be eaten by both sexes. Most of the staple crops are planted in June, at the beginning of the heavy rains, and the main harvests are in October-November, before the dry season begins fully. There is an elaborate system of mixed cropping and a system of crop rotation. All field work except weeding and harvesting is done by men.

There are no cash crops grown, except a little tobacco. However many Lugbara go to the south of Uganda annually, to grow tobacco in Bunyore or cotton in Buganda and Busoga.

#### The indigenous political system

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In spite of the superimposition of the modern administrative system, the indigenous political system is still active and can be observed, except that it is rarely called into action at its higher levels, chiefly because inter-clan feuds are now forbidden.

The Lugbarahave about fifty patrilineal clans, suru; all clans are considered to be of equal status and of equal genealogical depth, the founding ancestor of each clan being the son of Dribidu, the tribal ancestor. Clans are dispersed territorially, the individual segments also being called suru; I shall refer to these segments as Sections. Each clan has its name which is also given to its Sections, and clans and clan sections are exogamous groups. Each clan segment consist of several oriba, which I shall call lineages, although I do not know yet whether or not we may speak of a 'lineage system' in this society. There are also smaller and territorially distinct oriba; these lineages however are not politically independent, but are attached to territorially adjacent clan sections of different clan ancestry. Such a Section with attached lineages is one exogamous group, and is always considered as being a single unit in political matters. Several Sections belonging to different clans but all territorially adjacent form a large territorial group which is also referred to a suru, and which I call a District. A District is not an exogamous unit, although it is bound together by certain political and ritual ties. The

District is a purely territorial unit, but is always spoken of in lineage terms, that is to say, as a genealogical group descended from one ancestor. Also although it is considered ~~as~~ in these terms, it is not a unilineal descent group as is a clan or Section, but includes women of different clan affiliations.

To illustrate this system I shall describe one such District, Vurra (not the present day administrative unit of Vurra, which is a wider grouping, but the indigenous group). Vurra is an area of some four square miles and consists of six exogamous clan Sections, Ezuko, Ajono, Tilevu, Eruba, Anzu and Nyio. Each of these are segments of clans which have other similarly named segments elsewhere in Lugbaraland. Each of these six sections consist of several lineages, some being segments of the section itself and descended from the clan ancestor -- these lineages are referred to as kariba -- and others being attached lineages -- referred to as anyiba (strangers). These anyiba lineages are segments of other clans and as such have different ancestors. Members of anyiba lineages are thus members of two exogamous groups, the clan section to which they are affiliated and its related segments and also their own parent clans. The section of Ezuko in Vurra consists of eight lineages: five kariba lineages, Lariba, Anyanya, Oluko, Androvu and Ayivu, who have one common ~~ancestor~~ ancestor, and three anyiba lineages, Nyaca (parent clan Nyaca in the Congo, and attached by descent from a Nyaca ~~man~~ man ~~having~~ married an Ezuko girl), Orivu (parent clan Orivu in the Congo, and attached by descent from an Orivu man captured in war), and Omoo (a lineage descended from a Madi who once attached himself to Ezuko in a servile position). Clan sections may also be 'attached' within a District ( e.g. in Vurra the section Nyio is descended from a different ancestor than the other five sections), but at this level the attached group is not termed anyiba -- the groups are regarded as being of the same status and genealogical depth. The situations in which this clan system has most significance today is in the regulation of marriage (there may be interlocking systems of exogamous links, as explained above), in ritual, and in the establishment of a man's social status -- he is placed in Lugbara society by membership of clan, section and lineage. A woman does not change her clan affiliation at marriage: she always remains a member of her father's clan -- this is especially evident in ritual: on all ritual occasions she is a member of her parent clan and sacrifice for her can only be made by her father or brother, not by her husband.

Across this system of dispersed clans and lineages there runs a division of clans into those called Ma'di and those called Luu. Clans known as Luu are those 'possessing onyu': onyu is tuberculosis or any similar chest complaint, the possessing of which passes in the male line only. Ma'di clans do not have onyu. Ma'di and Luu are conceived of as being complete groups of which the clans are components: these groups, Ma'di and Luu, are themselves called suru. Clans belonging to different onyu-divisions have different customs at death, but otherwise there appears today to be no other significance in the division. For example, in Vurra District the sections of Ezuko, Anzu and Eruba are Luu, while Nyio, Ajono and Tilevu are Ma'di, but there are no reflections of this division in marriage ties between them. Within a Luu section there may be attached lineages who are Ma'di, and vice versa. This division is found



is found throughout the Lugbara country; neither division has any especial status such as being 'owners of the land', as has often been found in other societies with a dichotomy of this kind. I suspect that it may reflect the twofold migration of the Lugbara into their present home, one division coming from the west via the South Sudan and the Nile Valley (Ma'di) and the other coming directly through the Congo (Luu; there is a District called Luu in the very west of Ugbaraland). But at present this is only conjecture.

In this system of dispersed clans and lineages intra-clan ties may clearly be very tenuous in cases where the dispersion is territorially wide. Occasions for meeting of clan elders are found in the death of elders and in intra-clan disputes, when clan myths and genealogies are recalled and clan solidarity reaffirmed. The commonest intra-clan dispute is in the event of members of the same clan wishing to marry. This almost invariably means that the two persons involved have already had sexual intercourse; the elders meet, make the necessary ~~marriage~~ sacrifices and the marriage is prohibited. As yet I have no cases of marriage being allowed in the case of members of territorially very remotely related lineages; this would presumably be followed by clan fission. That fission does occur can be seen from the fact that there are several examples of exogamous clans bearing the same name.

Lugbara genealogies are never more than six or seven generations deep from Dribidu, the first Lugbara on earth, to the present day (many of my informants even state that Dribidu was their great-grandfather, and describe him in detail). Genealogical ties of this type seem to have little significance in this society. This is presumably correlated with the very wide dispersion not only of clan sections but also of small 'independent' lineages which are attached to larger unrelated (patrilineally) clan sections. Connection is maintained chiefly by territorial contact; where this is lacking the relationship may soon be lost. Sections of the same clan appear to be aware of their relationship chiefly from the fact that they have the same clan name and it is generally recognised that the relationship exists; the actual genealogical link is known only to one or two elders, and as anyone who has tried to collect Lugbara genealogies will know, the elders usually contradict each other at every point.

#### Settlement and Kinship

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The term *jo* means hut or house, the home of the elementary family; in this polygynous society (1) every wife has her own hut for the use of herself and her children. Her husband will share the hut, or he may have a hut of his own to which he can retire and entertain guests; this is especially common in polygynous families -- in a monogamous home he will usually share his wife's hut. The

1. In a sample count made in ~~some~~clan sections of Vurra, figures of polygynous families are as follows:

Wives:	1.	2.	3.	4.	5plus.	Total
Cases:	35	23	5	4	1	68.

homestead, which I use to mean the dwelling of one man and his family, is known as the aku. Aku refers, in a monogamous family, to the hedged compound containing the wife's hut, the husband's hut if there is one, the granaries, the cooking hut, and the girls' hut (odrujo, in which the unmarried girls and older children sleep and in which the girls entertain their lovers. There is usually only one odrujo in a joint family settlement), if there is one. In a polygynous family aku refers to the cluster of separate hedged compounds, each containing the hut, granaries and kitchen of a wife, one of them (that of the principal wife) probably also containing the husband's own hut and perhaps an odrujo. In this case each compound is an aku and also the whole cluster is aku. The huts of more than one wife may be in the same compound, but are usually distinct.

Several aku form the settlement of a joint family, consisting of the male descendants of a common grandfather or great-grandfather, their wives and unmarried female children. This group is based on the oriba, which is a unilineal descent group and so excludes the wives of the joint family members. However, the term oriba is usually loosely used to refer to the whole settlement, but this is only for ease of reference; the Lugbara make a clear distinction between the two groups. The term oriba is also used to refer to a larger descent group which may form the core of several related joint families; in this case oriba is used (again loosely) to refer to the whole settlement. There is no other word, aku not being used for a group of this size, two or three of which will form a complete clan section. Within the joint family oriba of three or four generations' depth smaller descent groups are recognised in certain situations, although they have no specific name to distinguish them; these are segments of the oriba differentiated by paternal or maternal origin (i.e. the sons of brothers, or the sons of a man by different wives, etc.).

The oriba <sup>lineage</sup> is the landholding and cattleholding group, and the group regarded as a single unit within the clan section at ceremonies of food, beer and arrow distribution and at ritual occasions. The elders of a section who are its representatives at any occasion are the most senior men of its component lineages ('ba wara). The senior representative (who actually carries out ritual actions and makes final decisions himself) of the section is the senior 'ba wara of the genealogically senior lineage; he is a man of high ritual status, has powers of cursing which are his alone, and formerly had high political status also. His eldest sister (whether or not older than he) also has high ritual status.

(the term used for the head of a joint family.)

There would appear to be no womens' organisations at all in the sense of 'submerged' matrilineages, or anything of the kind often reported from other societies. Maternal descent however is of considerable importance; a man may not marry a girl of his mother's clan, and sons of a man by different wives are differentiated and will in time form distinct oriba within the same clan section. Most attached lineages are attached to the 'host' ~~group~~ group by the mother's-brother-sister's son tie.

Women ~~do~~ have very considerable status in this formally strongly patrilineal society. This appears especially in three ways: women play certain roles in ritual, particularly when they ~~are widows of important men or the~~ sole surviving sibling; women group together on certain occasions in opposition to the men (e.g. at death and harvest dances, and on any occasion when a woman or a woman's dependant is slighted); on these occasions they are regarded as invincible and always get their own way. Lastly, this status is seen in the very considerable amount of freedom allowed to women, especially to unmarried girls and 'returned' wives. They have complete sexual freedom and arrange their own lives as they want -- their fathers and brothers have no right to interfere unless the wellbeing of the lineage is threatened. There is a strong opposition between the sexes, expressed most obviously in obscene joking between ~~the~~ men and women of different unrelated clans and between certain sets of relatives. All 'structural' joking relationships are expressed in terms of sexual obscenity between the sexes.

The system of personal kinship terminology is to be seen against the clan system. The clan section is the limit of this terminology. Members of other sections within which the speaker has a relative are all referred to by the same terms, according to sex (e.g. a man will refer to all males in his mother's clan section as Mother's brother and to all females as Mother) irrespective of age and other status differences which may be recognised between the members of that section.

### The ritual system

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The ritual system of the Lugbara is confined to the ancestor cult. There is no God-cult (there is the concept of Adro, the Thing which creates and destroys life, but there is no cult. The Madi have a concept of Ruhanga, but I understand that that is a recent importation, but have no other information about it. The Christian concept of Mungu, God, is only held by a very small proportion of the Lugbara).

The ancestor-cult has two aspects: it is a system of social sanctions and is also a reflection of the lineage system. The system of social sanctions by which intra-clan relationships are controlled are almost entirely found in the ancestor-cult. In the indigenous system political (inter-section or inter-district) relationships were maintained by the institution of the feud; today its place had been taken by the Government administrative



The ancestors are regarded as being responsible for all ~~much~~ trouble which may befall people; they are approached that trouble may be averted by sacrifice at ancestor-shrines (orijo). A man may not sacrifice while his father or classificatory father within the same oriba is alive, or while his mother is still living.

all When ~~both~~ parents are dead ~~and~~ and he can sacrifice himself, he builds a shrine to his father. As soon as he becomes head of a wider family ~~group~~ group he adds shrines to his grandfather, great-grandfather, etc -- whoever is the apical ancestor of that particular group. In addition, if he brings the ancestors' wrath upon himself by his actions, or if another person does so, he will go to a diviner, or divine himself with ~~minimium~~ chickens at a divination-hole; he will be told that the trouble comes from a certain ancestor and he will then build a shrine to that ancestor. Patrilineal ancestors' shrines are in the form of flat stones, one for each spirit, which are placed together beneath the main granary to form box-like 'houses'. Matrilineal shrines are in the form of small thatched huts placed beneath the eaves of the principal wife's hut. Sacrifices take the form of beer and food, placed within the shrine.

~~The head of a man's family has a shrine to the apical ancestor of his oriba. This shrine (tiri) is placed outside his hut beneath a tree (no special tree) and is in the form of a flat stone with a hole in the middle, placed upright. In addition the 'ba wara of certain lineages have a shrine to Kaliaj, who is not an ancestor, but a spirit created out of nothing ('like the wind'), and who can bring certain particular illnesses if not appeased; he is regarded as 'belonging' to certain clans. The head m elder of a clan section has a tiri shrine to the apical ancestor of that section.~~

The head 'ba wara of an oriba also has a shrine to the apical ancestor of the oriba. This shrine (tiri) is placed outside his hut beneath a tree (no special tree) and is in the form of a flat stone with a hole in the middle, placed upright. In addition the 'ba wara of certain lineages have a shrine to Kaliaj, who is not an ancestor, but a spirit created out of nothing ('like the wind'), and who can bring certain particular illnesses if not appeased; he is regarded as 'belonging' to certain clans. The head m elder of a clan section has a tiri shrine to the apical ancestor of that section.

The Lugbara believe that a great deal of misfortune is the result of witchcraft, by which ancestors are persuaded to bring misfortune to others. There are two types of witchcraft: ru, which refers to the use of supernatural power by a 'ba wara against members of his oriba (he 'whispers inside the orijo' and the ancestors carry out his request for punishment), and ole ru, which refers to sorcery against people of other clans. If a man is the victim of ole ru he will build a drilonzi shrine, dedicated to no particular ancestor, but to all in general. In addition there are some dozen or so other types of shrine which are built on particular occasions.

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## Lugbara labour migration

Lugbara society is at present undergoing fairly rapid change, due to the impact of the European administration and a money economy. Money is now the almost universal means of exchange (although as yet there is no word for 'buy' or 'sell', but only for 'exchange', which is used for all such transactions, whether at a market or the exchange of a wife for bridewealth). It is, however, noticeable that the prices of commodities are not yet always adjusted to a 'free' money economy; e.g. the value of traditional handmade articles (arrows, knives, etc) is still given in terms of other similar commodities. When these 'equivalent' values are translated into money terms they are often quite discrepant (e.g. a small pot may be worth ~~two~~ two hoes, but in money terms a small pot is worth two shillings and one hoe ~~four~~ four shillings).

There are, as I have said, no cash crops grown by the Lugbara, in their own district, and to meet tax and other modern money demands, they sell their only <sup>saleable</sup> commodity, their labour. There is no local demand, so they go to the south, to Bunyoro, Buganda and Busoga. Today a fair proportion are beginning to buy land there and grow cotton and tobacco, but to do this they must first earn money, and wage labour for Indians and Baganda is the traditional reason for going 'ngamboni', 'to the other side' (of Lake Albert). By now this tradition is well established (it dates from about 1925, but has reached its present scale only in the last few years) and there are parts of Bunyoro and Buganda with long-settled Lugbara villages, with the settlers living permanently and never coming home or sending money back. These men are 'lost' to their families, but nevertheless ties are maintained and it is assumed that they will come home one day.

The peak months for migration southwards are July-September, after the planting, and most men come back about nine months later. The scale of the migration may be seen from the following figures; they are for Lugbara males only (the number of wives is small):

1947	Southwards:	8205	Uganda	Lugbara	2567	Congo,	total	10772.
1948	Northwards:	5456	"	"	2132	"	"	7588
1948	Southwards:	6379	"	"	1965	"		8344
1949	Northwards:	5870	"	"	1855	"		7725
1949	Southwards:	5555	"	"	2564	"		8119
1950	not yet available.							

I realise that from these figures no safe generalisations can be made: they are only given here to show the scale of the migration. But there is clearly a big 'loss' of people who do not return. The extent to which this migration of young adult men affects the



the local society may be seen from the figures of men absent from their homes at the present moment from two clan sections in the area where I am working:

In Ezuko section, of 732 taxpayers, 73 (10%) are away; of those, 21 have been away one year, 9 two years and 38 three or more years (most of these 38 are regarded here as 'lost').

In Opika section, of 457 taxpayers, 107 (24%) are away; of those, 44 have been away one year, 14 two years and 49 three or more.

It should be noted that these are both thickly populated areas. There are correlations between numbers of men away and the density of population, and also between numbers of absent men and the popular or unpopular behaviour of African government officials; this may at first appear a frivolous reason, but it is the one given me most often by informants. It is the reason given me, for example, to explain the difference in proportion of absent men from Ezuko and Opika, given above.

The main reason for going south is to acquire money which cannot be gained locally. It is extremely difficult to get information on this point, for obvious reasons, but my enquiries so far show that the average sum of money brought back by a man after nine months in the south is rarely more than 50 or 60 shillings, plus a few goods (a blanket, shirt, etc).

These figures may give some idea of the problem; any more detailed and reliable analysis must wait for a deeper analysis of Lugbara society in general.

Vurra, West Nile,  
9 October 1950.



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